

**Problems, Perceptions and Needs of Workers
in the C2 Small Industry Complex
in 10th of Ramadan City**

by

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Introduction

The present study has been conducted under the auspices of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on request of the Association of Small Industrialists and Small Scale Industries in the New Cities (ASSINC) which is situated in 10th of Ramadan City. The purpose of the study was to come forward with ideas and recommendations to help develop a concept for the establishment of a social club for the workers in the C2 small industry complex in 10th of Ramadan City. Therefore, background information on working and living conditions as well as perceptions of both entrepreneurs and workers has been collected. Recommendations have been formulated mainly on the basis of the perceptions and proposals of the workers.

Due to the specific purpose of the study, a practical approach has been adopted. Based on the findings of the two previous studies, two preliminary questionnaires have been drafted, one for the workers and one for the entrepreneurs. The questionnaire for the workers has been adjusted and complemented several times according to new aspects which have been raised during the interviews. Its purpose was not only to collect data but also to stimulate comments and discussions.

Interviews have been carried out with 40 workers in nine different enterprises. Additional interviews have been conducted with either the entrepreneurs or their representatives. Basic information and data has been provided for altogether 305 workers in these companies. Unfortunately, it was not possible to systematically assess perceptions of the entrepreneurs and their readiness to support the club because representatives were usually only prepared to provide information on the company but did not want to comment on behalf of the entrepreneurs.

Only blue collar workers have been classified as workers. Employees in the administration are not included in the sample because it can be assumed that problems, perceptions and needs of blue collar and white collar workers differ in many respects. The limited scope of this study did, however, not allow for a more differentiated classification including administrative staff.

The interviews have been conducted during working hours. In addition, two extended group interviews have been carried out in the evening in resthouses where a number of commuting workers are staying during the week. The working language was Arabic. The interviews have been arranged by the secretary of ASSINC. It turned out to be rather difficult to make these arrangements since the workers who participated in the interviews had to leave the production process for an average time of one hour. It was usually only possible to keep an appointment when the entrepreneur himself was in the factory. Many meetings had to be cancelled or postponed several times.

The circumstances under which the interviews have been conducted differed considerably. Around one third were individual interviews and two thirds group interviews with two or more workers. Workers seem to have been selected mainly according to the requirements of the production process. In some cases the entrepreneur or his representative have been present or nearby. This did sometimes but not always affect the workers' readiness to answer questions straightforward. Even in the presence of an official representative of the company, some workers have been surprisingly outspoken in their comments. Others, however, tended to be very careful in their statements.

The interviewed workers are not representative and should be rather considered as a random sample. Although most classifications, comments and suggestions made by the workers have been quantified, the numbers should not be taken as accurate data. Nevertheless, the statements of the workers have been clear and elaborated enough to extract problem areas and priorities and to provide a sufficient basis for recommendations. One important aspect is, however, extremely underrepresented in this study: since it was only possible to talk to three female workers, gender-specific needs and perceptions are not really covered. This shortcoming should be taken into consideration when a final concept for the social club is drafted.

In addition to the interviews with workers and entrepreneurs, several conversations have been conducted with a social scientist, a legal expert and representatives of the International Labor Organization, the Social Fund for Development and the Insurance Fund of the Arab Contractors. These persons have provided background information and some advice for the recommendations.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who supported this study with time and efforts. These include the entrepreneurs who allowed for access to their factories and devoted their time to answering questions as well as administrative staff who provided me with data and information and the foremen who had to cope with disturbances and interruptions in the production process during the interviews. Workers on the other hand were ready to renounce part of their breaks and their scarce free time for the interviews. Last but not least, special thanks have to be directed to ASSINC's secretary who arranged all appointments and led me to all places where interviews took place, in some cases even after working hours.

I. Living and Working Environment

I.1. 10th of Ramadan City

10th of Ramadan City is situated on the desert road between Cairo and Ismailiya. It has been established as the first of a series of new cities by presidential decree in 1979. Destined to absorb part of the population in the overcrowded urban centers, especially Cairo, 10th of Ramadan City was envisaged to accommodate half a million inhabitants by the year 2000. Until autumn 1992, however, only an estimated 20,000 inhabitants were living in the city.

Contrary to problems of attracting a sufficient number of people to move to 10th of Ramadan, the industrial development in the city was quite successful. By 1992, around 53,000 workers have been employed in nearly 500 companies.¹ In the beginning of the 90ies, the C2 small-scale industry complex has been established by the Ministry of Industry. It consists of 240 units. So far, 200 of them are operated by nearly 80 enterprises. An estimated 1000 workers are employed in the C2 small-scale industry complex.²

The city gives the impression of being somehow deserted and still under construction. Along the large, empty roads residential areas with uniform five-story buildings constructed by the government for low-income residents alternate with vast desert areas mostly sold to private investors who did not build on the land for reasons of speculation. Many houses and appartments are empty because their owners are living most of the year in Cairo or other places. Only in its older quarters does the city look like a real city with shops, markets, cafeterias and pedestrians strolling around.

Despite the huge housing potential of 10th of Ramadan, workers find it extremely difficult to settle down in the city. Appartments built by the government for low-income households are still too expensive, especially since most of these flats are rather big, i.e. have a size of more than 75 m². A flat with 85-90 m² would cost for example around 30,000 LE. Buyers have to make a down-payment of approximately 5,000 LE and then pay for another two years 1,000 LE every three months before they can move into the flat. The remaining 17,000 LE have to be paid in monthly rates of around 70 LE. To rent an appartment is not really attractive since this is usually done without a written contract and thus without any guarantees for the tenant. The atmosphere of the city, which is so different from the workers' old, traditionally grown towns of origin or the liveliness of Cairo, is not likely to countervail these disadvantages.

¹ see Henk Knaupe, Ulrich G. Wurzel, *Aufbruch in die Wüste – Die neuen Städte in Ägypten*, Frankfurt am Main, 1995, S. 94

² leaflet of ASSINC, 1997

I.2. The Workers in the C2 Small Industry Complex

There is no exact information available concerning the number of workers and enterprises in the C2 small industry complex in 10th of Ramadan City. The findings of Mahdi/Said (1996) indicate the existence of 56 enterprises with an estimated 986 workers and an average of 17,6 workers per enterprise. A brochure of ASSINC (1997) states the existence of 80 enterprises. ASSINC board members estimated the number of workers at around 1000.

Size, number of employees, products and type of production vary considerably in the individual companies. Most of them produce finished products like furniture, textiles, plastic articles, stationary and food. A few enterprises with less than five workers and very simple tools resemble rather workshops than factories. On the other hand some are equipped with sophisticated machinery and automatic production lines. At least three companies operate with a workforce of between 50 and 100 workers. The majority of the enterprises employs between 10 and 50 workers and depends on labor-intensive production techniques. A high technical level, on the other hand, does not necessarily correlate with a large number of employees.

Most of the workers are male and between 20 and 30 years old as will be shown in the following tables³:

Table (1)
Distribution According to Sex

	Present Study	Mahdi/Said
male	88,5 %	88,7 %
female	11,5 %	11,3 %

Table (2)
Distribution According to Age

	Present Study	Mahdi/Said
< 15 ⁴	1 %	2 %
15-20	17,7 %	no information
20-30	62,6 %	56 %
> 30	18,7 %	no information

Slightly more than half of the 270 male workers in the 9 factories who were subject of this study are married. The fact that women tend to stop working after marriage is reflected in the low number of married female workers found in the sample:

Table (3)
Distribution According to Personal Status

	Male	Female	Total
married	44,6 %	1,3 %	46 %
single	43,9 %	10,2 %	54 %
total	88,5 %	11,5 %	100 %

The overwhelming majority of the workers have obtained their skills through on-the-job training in the present and/or previous jobs. Concerning the educational background, it was found that the majority holds a diploma of an industrial or technical secondary school. There is, however, a considerable number of workers who are either illiterate or have enjoyed only a low level of education:

Table (4)
Educational Background⁵

	Male	Female	Total
illiterate	16,3 %	2,9 %	14,7 %
primary school	10 %	5,8 %	9,5 %
preparatory school	11,1 %	2,9 %	10,1 %
technical secondary school	48,5 %	37,1 %	47,2 %
general secondary school	3 %	34,2 %	6,5 %
high school	3 %	-	2,6 %
university	3,7 %	-	3,2 %
unclear	4,4 %	17,1 %	6,2 %

Only a minority of the workers have their permanent residence in 10th of Ramadan City. The vast majority is either returning to their home town every day or during week-ends. Those who are staying in the city during the week are in most cases living temporarily in shared flats, so-called resthouses (istiraha).

³ since no comprehensive data exists for the workforce as a whole, findings of the study of Mahdi/Said and partly of Moeller/Wenz will be included in the tables as far as available. (present study: sample of 305 workers, Mahdi/Said: sample of 470 workers. Moeller/Wenz: sample of 104 workers)

⁴ Mahdi/Said assume that the number of workers below 15 years is underestimated since they have noticed a considerable number of working children during visits to C2.

⁵ percentages relate to the total of either the male or the female workforce respectively. Only percentages under "total" relate to the workforce as a whole.

These apartments are often rented by the employers and provided to the workers as long as they are employed in their enterprise. In other cases the workers themselves organize these resthouses with colleagues of the same company or from the same home town:

Table (5)
Place of Residence

	Present study	Mahdi/Said
<i>10th of Ramadan</i>	13,5 %	17,3 %
<i>resthouses</i>	41,9 %	27 %
<i>commuters</i>	44,1 %	50 %

Reportedly, five women are living together in a shared flat in 10th of Ramadan. These women are probably an exception since none of the workers interviewed in the present study knew about other female workers living in resthouses.

Most of the commuters come from Cairo or Sharqiya. Since they need a lot of time for transportation, it is not surprising that a considerable number of workers is living temporarily in resthouses in 10th of Ramadan City. These workers return to their home town only once or twice a month. Some are coming from Upper Egyptian towns or villages and travel even less frequently due to the long distance and the high travel expenses.

Table (6)
Hometown and Transportation

Home Town	% of Commuters	Time Needed for Transportation
<i>Cairo</i>	42,1 %	3 - 4 hours
<i>Sharqiya</i>	41,7 %	1,5 - 4 hours
<i>other</i>	16,2 %	3 - 10 hours

The findings of the present study concerning the period of employment differ from the indications in the sample of Mahdi/Said. The latter found a much higher number of workers having been employed for more than 3 years than the information of the present study suggests:

Table (7)
Period of Employment

	Present Study			Mahdi/Said
	female	male	total	
<i>< 1 year</i>	2,9 %	22,3 %	20,0 %	4,9 %
<i>1-3 years</i>	37,2 %	24,0 %	25,6 %	35,7 %
<i>> 3 years</i>	17,1 %	21,1 %	20,6 %	40 %
<i>unclear</i>	42,8 %	32,6 %	33,8 %	12,3 %

There may be several explanations. In the present study it was not possible to obtain information on this question for as much as one third of the workers. The missing third may well be employed for a longer period. The higher number of recently employed workers indicated in the present study may be seasonal. Another reason for the difference could be that both studies have covered different companies by their respective sample.

I.3. Working Conditions

I.3.1. The Legal Framework

According to Egyptian law, employment contracts can be concluded in three different forms: permanent employment contracts, temporary employment contracts for the fulfilment of limited tasks and seasonal employment contracts in branches with seasonal booms and lulls. The possibility to conclude temporary or seasonal employment contracts is sometimes misused by employers. They give to the worker a temporary contract for less than a year and hire the same worker again with a new temporary contract within a short time after the expiry of the old contract. In some cases workers might be employed in the same company for years without ever obtaining a permanent employment contract.

Only permanent employment contracts offer to the worker a relative protection from dismissal. In practice, however, a lot of unlawfull dismissals occur, particularly in the private sector and in smaller companies where the workers are not organized in trade unions. Moreover, Egyptian laws dealing with industrial relations are in many respects not clear so that a lot of disputes are taken to the courts. Even court verdicts are, however, not always consistent. Contradicting sentences exist for example concerning the period after which workers are entitled to having their temporary employment contracts changed into permanent ones. There is a tendency in court rules to set a time limit of one year for temporary contracts.

According to the law, all workers have to be registered with the General Authority for Insurance (al-hai'a al-'amma lil-ta'minat) regardless of the type of their employment contracts. Moreover, all workers are entitled to

annual leave after having worked for at least six months in the same company. The amount of holidays are calculated according to the time of employment.

The contribution to the insurance has to be paid by the employer on a monthly basis and amounts to 40% of the wages. 26% have to be paid by the entrepreneur and 14% plus an additional 1,5% for health insurance are deducted from the salary of the worker. Health insurance can be neglected on condition that the employers organize regular health care for their workers on a private basis that covers at least the entitlements offered by the public health insurance.

Included in the insurance are the following entitlements: A pension after retirement, treatment, medicine and continued salary in case of illness or accidents occurring at the work place or the way to work or back home or in case of disability, death and unemployment. Family members are not included in the insurance. Some public companies offer complementary insurance schemes to the families of their workers. Since this kind of additional insurance is not prescribed by law, it is usually negotiated with the trade unions and can be terminated at any time.

1.3.2. Insurance and Job Stability in the C2 Small Industry Complex

It was not possible to find out the exact number of workers who are working with a written, permanent contract and are registered with the insurance. Surprisingly, some of the workers themselves were not aware of their present status as will be explained later. Many of the enterprises are mainly working on orders. If there is a big order, they usually hire additional workers who will find themselves without a job once the order is terminated.

The two previous studies came to different conclusions concerning the number of workers who have a written contract and are covered by insurance. The findings of Mahdi/Said indicate that 85% (in a sample of 470 workers) are working with a written contract whereas Moeller/Wenz found that 57% (out of 86 workers answering this question) were not insured at all and an additional 7% was not covered by health insurance. According to the latter study, only 37% have been working with a written contract.

Due to the comparatively low monetary value of the entitlements in addition to the shortages of the public health care system, it is not surprising that a number of workers do not insist on being registered with the insurance. In many cases, the salaries hardly cover the living expenses and some workers, therefore, do not object to being spared the wage deductions for insurance.

1.3.3. Wage Levels

There is no exact information available concerning the wage levels of the workers. Mahdi/Said found that 72,5% of the workers in their sample are paid between 80 L.E. and 120 L.E. a month. The authors themselves pointed out, however, that the real salaries could be considerably higher because workers and employers alike tend to understate the actual amounts in order to reduce the contributions to the social insurance. Findings of Moeller/Wenz indicate an average wage of 347 L.E. for skilled and 170 L.E. for unskilled workers. The workers interviewed for the present study stated that wages usually range from 90 L.E. to 500 L.E. with an average of 240 L.E. while only 21 workers have given exact information on their own salary. Not included are additional incentives and compensation for overtime.

The comments of many workers during the present study confirm the findings of Moeller/Wenz concerning the difficulty to make a living with their monthly salaries. 40% of the workers interviewed by Moeller/Wenz stated that they are not able to cover their living expenses with the money they earn in the enterprises and an additional 27% are struggling to make ends meet. 37% of the workers in that sample mentioned to have a second job. If one takes into consideration that many workers are not covered by any insurance, it is not surprising that the quest for more social security turned out to be one of the priority concerns of the workers as will be highlighted later.

1.3.4. Working Hours

According to the information given by the entrepreneurs or their representatives during the present study, the average working hours amount to 59,6 hours per week. Overtime work is not included in this number. In some enterprises overtime is an exception, in others it is required frequently. If there is a big order, some workers might work continuously for up to 24 hours, then sleep for some hours in the premises of the enterprise and continue until the order is finished. Subsequently, they are usually granted several additional holidays. The amount and distribution of working hours in the companies covered by the present study can be seen in detail in the following table⁶:

⁶ Information given by the employers

Table (8)
*Breakdown of Working Hours According to
 Number of Workers and Enterprises*

Working Hours	No. of Workers / No. of Companies					
	117 / 3	33 / 1	93 / 1	26 / 2	2 / 1	34 / 1
<i>shifts of 12 hours</i>	x	x				
<i>shifts of 10 hours</i>						x
<i>shifts of 9 1/4 hours</i>			x	x		
<i>shifts of 9 hours⁷</i>					x	
<i>night shifts</i>	x	x				
<i>1 day/week free</i>	x			x		x
<i>2 days/week free</i>		x	x		x	

The table shows that there are considerable differences concerning the number of working hours. The range is between 45 and 72 hours per week. Most of the workers who are working for long hours are staying in resthouses in 10th of Ramadan City most of the time. But even with less working hours one has to take into consideration the relatively long time commuting workers need to come to their work place and return in the evening. It can be assumed, therefore, that the working conditions in general are quite exhausting for many workers.

II. Problems as Perceived by the Workers

II.1. Social and Job Security

Lack of social security was mentioned as a problem by 27 (67,5%) of the interviewed workers and 24 (60%) stated that they do not feel secure about their work place. Nineteen of them placed these two issues first when asked to prioritize their problems. Especially the young, recently married workers pointed out that they feel very unsecure since falling seriously ill, having an accident or losing the job would instantly lead to a crisis for the whole family. Skilled workers were less scared by the possibility of losing their jobs since they would find enough suitable alternatives in 10th of Ramadan City.

There seems to be little awareness among the workers about their legal rights and entitlements. Some were not even sure whether they are insured or not since they did not sign a written contract but have been informed by their employers that they are registered with the insurance. Young workers in particular tend to perceive themselves as working in a market which is solely functioning according to the interests of their employers and offers them no protection whatever.

Some workers complained about the absence of any real control by the responsible authorities. They stated examples where officials in the social insurance have allegedly been bribed in order not to investigate in cases of unlawful dismissals. Others said that they have left their company after disputes with the employer about wages or working conditions. When they returned later to the same company they were only offered oral agreements instead of the written contracts they had before.

In other cases, the workers themselves left the enterprise after repeated disputes with the entrepreneur or the foremen about wage deductions, promised additional incentives which were not handed out or rude words. On the other hand, a number of workers expressed relative satisfaction with their working conditions. According to them, their employers are aware that they could only raise productivity and ensure quality production when they offer favorable and permanent contracts to their workforce.

The work relations inside the enterprises have been characterised by some workers as being demotivating. According to them, the strict top-down management leaves no room for self-initiative and responsibility. Some of the workers complained that the entrepreneurs would not acknowledge their skills and even blame them automatically for problems occurring due to poor tools and technology. They wish to have a better flow of information and communication and would like to be viewed as partners in the production process.

When it came to their working conditions, the workers tended to generalize their statements. It was not always easy to distinguish in which cases they reported own experiences and in which cases they were talking on

⁷ on the last day of the week 16 of these workers are only working for 6 hours

behalf of colleagues. Given the fact that the working conditions differ considerably from company to company, it is extremely difficult to quantify statements on working conditions. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that for a considerable number of workers the lack of stable working conditions represents a big problem.

It is therefore not surprising that many see their present job as being only temporary. They would readily accept a new job with either a better salary or closer to their home town. The statements were, however, in many cases not unequivocal. Some of the workers pointed out that they would prefer to stay if they would find suitable housing in 10th of Ramadan and stable, more favorable working conditions in their present jobs.

II.2. Lack of Sufficient Health Care

Insufficient health care has been mentioned as a problem by 29 workers (72,5%) whereas those who are living permanently or most of the time in 10th of Ramadan City have put more emphasis on the issue. Commuting workers complained mainly about insufficient health care in case of emergency, e.g. accidents at the work place. They also expressed their disappointment that no regular health examinations are made like in the public sector or some big private sector companies.

Those workers who are covered by insurance are entitled to free treatment by physicians registered with the health insurance. Public hospitals usually have a department where treatment for insured persons is offered free of charge. Those who went to this department in 10th of Ramadan complained, however, that the doctors in many cases only prescribed a list of medicaments without any previous examination. Private physicians are usually not affordable for the workers and therefore no alternative.

In some cases, entrepreneurs paid for operations or at least part of it. Other workers are relying on family members or physicians offering their services at very low fees in clinics connected to mosques or churches. A physician of the health insurance is offering free treatment at the premises of ASSINC. This offer is, however, restricted to the workers insured with the public health insurance. Since the physician is coming only twice a week for not more than two hours in the morning, usually only workers with acute problems occurring during this time benefit from this service. Most of the workers did not even know about the physician and none would go without being sent by his or her supervisor.

II.3. Housing

Housing was stated as a problem by 16 (40%) of the workers. Especially the young ones who are newly married or want to marry and live in 10th of Ramadan City find it extremely difficult to buy or rent suitable apartments at reasonable

prices. For this reason, some of them are living in rented flats equipped only with minimal furniture like raw wooden beds with a thin mattress, some chairs, a stack and a small hearth. The lack of security in these apartments represents a big problem for the family. Like the resthouses, the flats are rented in most cases without any written contract so that the owner can terminate the tenancy at any time.

Those living in shared resthouses complained about the low standard of the apartments, the absence of any private space and the high prices in case they have to pay the rent themselves. Most of the resthouses consist of either two or four sleeping-rooms shared usually by six to eight or ten to fifteen workers respectively. The average rent for a two-room flat is around 140 L.E.

Since most of the resthouses are located in areas inhabited by families, the workers have to be extremely careful with their behaviour since any complaint by their neighbours may at once result in problems with the police. According to the workers, the families perceive the presence of groups of unmarried young men in their neighbourhood as a threat to the female family members. Any noise, wrong word or behaviour may therefore lead to serious problems. The workers mentioned several incidences where the police has been called and upon entering the flat has allegedly beaten up and arrested workers at once without any previous investigation.

II.4. Lack of Recreational Activities

There are no recreational activities available for the workers of the small-scale industry complex. The existing Sporting Club in 10th of Ramadan City is both too expensive and too far away. The only alternative left for the workers is, therefore, to spend their free time in one of the relatively cheap coffee-shops. But even those are not regularly frequented by the workers since the cost for smoking a waterpipe and drinking only one Coca Cola a day would also add up to a bill of around 60 L.E. a month. Particularly workers living in resthouses are suffering from boredom and the absence of anything to enjoy after work.

Two of the female workers stated that although they return to their home towns every day together with their female colleagues, all of them deplore the non-availability of activities like excursions or festivities. These would alleviate the burden of their work which they experience as being very tiring. On the other hand, those activities would allow them to escape the pressures and restrictions they have to confront at home at least for a while and strengthen their ties with their colleagues.

II.5. Lack of Cultural and Educational Activities

The relatively low number of workers who complained about the lack of cultural and educational activities reflects both the workers' different educational

background and the long working hours. Many of them stated that they are simply too tired after work and would not be able to participate in any activity which needs concentration. Even from those 10 (25%) and 3 (7,5%) workers respectively who explicitly pointed to these two issues, only 2 gave it any priority. Both of them are university graduates who feel that their present work does not offer them any possibility to broaden their professional and personal horizons. Some of the illiterate or quasi-illiterate workers said they would like to have literacy classes or opportunities to further their education. They were, however, not sure whether they would be really able to participate on a regular basis because of frequent, unexpected overtime or because of their feeling too exhausted after work.

II.6. Food

Surprisingly, food turned out to be a major concern for the workers. No markets or groceries are located in the area of C2 itself so that the workers depend on either sandwiches they bring along from home or on the food sellers and small, popular restaurants in the area. Since there are no refrigerators to keep sandwiches fresh, most of them buy Foul (fava beans), potatoe chips and Taamiya (small balls consisting mainly of smashed beans, paisley and spices) from outside.

Bad quality and high prices were mentioned by 31 workers (77,5%). A closer look at the available food in the area of the C2 small industry complex was indeed not encouraging. It seemed that the oil in which the Taamiya were fried has not been changed for a month since it looked completely black. The dishes used to serve the foul were all washed in the same plastic bucket without changing the water. In one place the ketchup has expired two month before being served and the quality of the bread seen in different areas in 10th of Ramadan was generally very poor.

The quality and prices of vegetables, fruit and other food items in a market close to many of the resthouses were comparable to those in similar markets in Cairo. However, since most of the workers are coming from the countryside where food is often considerably cheaper and fresh, vegetables and fruit in 10th of Ramadan City might well be seen as being more expensive and less fresh.

III. Suggestions of the Workers Concerning the Social Club

III.1. Basic Facilities and Services

The basic facilities in the premises of a social club for the workers would be primarily used by workers who are living permanently or temporarily (resthouses) in 10th of Ramadan City. The workers stressed that their club should not only have a caféteria but be also equipped with a TV set and a video recorder, games like tawla, domino, chess and ping pong, a library and items for sport activities. Football and karate have been mentioned as the favourite sports. A health clinic in the premises of the club would be highly appreciated. Some workers underlined in this context that health care services should include regular prophylactic health examinations.

Some workers suggested to allow members of the club to use the premises for private festivities like weddings or engagements. Workers with special talents like playing instruments or skills like hairdressing could offer their services for these occasions at relatively cheap prices.

III.2. Priorities and Scope

Concerning potential activities of the club, the workers gave clear priority to additional social security schemes like trust funds (97%), followed by the provision of cheap, healthy meals (83%), recreational activities (70%), health care (65%) and measures to increase job security and the protection of their rights (73%), especially protection from arbitrary dismissals and unjustified wage deductions. Twelve workers claimed that the latter should be the main function of the club.

The interests in particular activities varied according to sex, age, personal status, educational background, place of residence and working conditions. Regardless of these differences, sport events, excursions and summer camps at reduced prices would be appreciated by almost all workers with considerable enthusiasm. Most of them pointed out that starting activities should be directly related to improving their working and living conditions. This would attract and ensure the workers' participation and thus broaden the potential scope of the club.

III.3. Organisation, Administration and Participation

As to the organisation and the main target group of the club, most workers favored a dual system meaning that the use of basic facilities should be limited to members only whereas some activities like a trust fund, educational and training offers should be open to as many participants as possible.

According to the majority, only workers in the small-scale industry complex in 10th of Ramadan City should be admitted as members. Most married workers wanted the membership to include their families. In this context it has to be mentioned that some workers insisted on a strict

segregation of men and women whereas others wanted the club to be open for women and children on week-ends and for special events. Some also suggested activities for the wives of workers since many of them are living without relatives and friends in 10th of Ramadan City and feel isolated.

All workers are willing to financially contribute to the club. Most of them stated, however, that all fees and prices have to be very low. What "very low" exactly means was difficult to find out. The workers underlined that their contributions depend on the extent of tangible benefits offered to them by the club. Since these are not clear yet, nobody was willing to determine fixed amounts.

The attempt to assess the workers' ability and willingness to participate in the organization of activities was faced with similar difficulties. Generally speaking, it can be assumed that the more the activities meet the needs and interests of the workers the more likely they are prepared to contribute time and efforts. Particularly unmarried workers who are living permanently or most of the time in 10th of Ramadan City are principally prepared to participate within the limits of their free time.

III.4. Suggestions and Comments on Particular Activities

III.4.1. Trust Funds and Complementary Insurance Schemes

The idea of the establishment of a trust fund has been welcomed by 39 workers whereas most of them favored an extended trust fund scheme covering more than entitlements to a certain amount of money in case of crisis or special events like illness, death, marriage or child birth. Complementary insurance schemes covering intermediate periods of unemployment and increasing pensions would be appreciated by many workers. For most workers the possible monthly contribution to a trust fund would, however, be limited to an amount of not more than 10 L.E.

Young workers who want to marry would like to have the trust fund combined with a credit line for the purchase of consumer goods like refrigerators or washing machines. Some of them suggested that the club should make arrangements with companies in order to get access to hire purchases at favorable conditions.

III.4.2. Job Security and Protection of Workers' Rights

Most workers had only a vague idea of how their rights could be protected. Suggestions ranged from founding a workers committee which should have a say in all disputes between employers and employees to establishing a committee by the entrepreneurs themselves which should review dismissals and make regular, un-announced control checks in the enterprises. ASSINC was sometimes stated as a potential neutral party who could influence the entrepreneurs in favor of the workers' claims. Interestingly, this was proposed

More specifically, 63% of the workers stated that legal advice and awareness-raising activities would be important to enable them to protect themselves against violations of their rights. Furthermore, most workers welcomed the idea of establishing a job placement service. This proposal was strongly supported by 29 workers. Two others expressed, however, reservations. They were afraid that employers might misuse the existence of such a service as an argument to justify dismissals in case of seasonal lulls.

III.4.3. Educational and Training Facilities

Differences in the educational and professional background and the working conditions were reflected most obviously in suggestions concerning educational and training activities. Professional upgrading possibilities were generally appreciated provided that courses would be free of charge and take place within working hours. A need for literacy classes or adult education was expressed by 14 workers whereas 6 of them were talking on behalf of colleagues in their companies. Although three of them have completed primary school or dropped out of prep-school, they considered themselves as quasi-illiterates since they have never used their reading and writing skills again after school.

Most of the 8 workers who would like to have language classes are relatively high educated (at least industrial or technical secondary school certificates). The 6 workers who want to have computer courses belong to the same group. Most of them would like to switch later to administrative jobs. It has to be mentioned, however, that half of the 8 workers are returning everyday to their hometown. It would probably be difficult for them to attend classes in 10th of Ramadan City after working hours.

Some workers expressed interest in lectures. As possible themes they mentioned either topics related to their professional skills, their rights as workers or operational safety in their work place. In this context, some workers proposed first aid courses. Two workers suggested lectures on the future of the Egyptian industry and labor market including some explanation about the potential impact of external factors like the GATT agreements. Two others were interested in periodic lectures about social or religious questions and current political developments like the peace process between Israel and Palestine.

However, only few workers gave lectures and similar activities any priority. Most of them subjected their participation in educational and training activities in general to not working overtime when these activities take place. Due to the insufficient inner-city transportation system in 10th of Ramadan City, many of them also stressed that the venues should be located within walking distance from either their work place or their place of residence.

IV. Perceptions of the Entrepreneurs

As already mentioned in the introduction, it was not possible to draw a comprehensive picture of the perceptions of the entrepreneurs. Statements cannot be considered as being representative since the number included in the sample is too limited to make general statements. In addition, interviews were only partly conducted with entrepreneurs themselves. The following chapter can thus only present a very narrow picture.

As far as the entrepreneurs or their representatives commented on the impact of the workers' living and working conditions on the production process, they mentioned two main areas: the relatively high turnover in many companies and problems related to low quality and productivity. Some complained about the readiness of the workers to leave their work place as soon as another company would offer them only 5 L.E. per month more than their present salary. Others said that they face difficulties to find sufficiently trained employees since skilled workers would find relatively easy another job in places close to their home town.

In general, many entrepreneurs stated that there are only loose ties between workers and their work place which according to them represents a problem for both parties: the entrepreneurs cannot count on a stable workforce and the workers are not able to build their future on stability in their work place, a stable income and social security.

The fact that most workers are residing outside 10th of Ramadan City was seen as another problem since the long working hours together with the time spent for transportation have a negative impact on the work performance. Most entrepreneurs would, therefore, appreciate if more workers would settle down in 10th of Ramadan City. They understand, on the other hand, that the city does not offer enough incentives to encourage a decision to move there.

It has to be mentioned, however, that some entrepreneurs have been running their factories with the same workforce for many years. They pointed out that this is essential in order to ensure a smooth production process. In order to ensure a low labor turnover, these entrepreneurs either offered their workers favorable incentives and/or employed mainly workers coming from the same hometown as the entrepreneur. In this case, the relationship between employer and employees is usually not only based on work but also on strong personal ties.

The assessments of the entrepreneurs or their representatives concerning problems and needs of the workers differ in some respects from those of the workers themselves as shown in the following tables:

Table (9)
Main Problems of the Workers⁸
(Perception of the Entrepreneurs)

Problems	Number of Entrepreneurs	Number of Employees
<i>food</i>	4	166
<i>lack of educational and cultural activities</i>	3	214
<i>lack of social life</i>	3	198
<i>lack of sufficient health care</i>	3	120
<i>lack of social security</i>	2	121
<i>lack of training</i>	2	121
<i>transportation</i>	2	121
<i>housing</i>	2	50
<i>lack of recreational activities</i>	1	105
<i>no information</i>	3	22

⁸ The column in the middle indicates the number of entrepreneurs who classified a certain problem or need as relevant. The right column indicates the total number of workers who are employed in the companies whose directors/representatives made these classifications.

Table (10)
Most Attractive Activities for the Workers
(Perception of the Entrepreneurs)

Needs and Most Attractive Activities for the Workers	Number of Entrepreneurs	Number of Employees
<i>trust fund</i>	5	235
<i>cafeteria</i>	4	225
<i>library/video club</i>	4	225
<i>provision of meals</i>	4	223
<i>sport activities</i>	4	166
<i>language classes</i>	3	148
<i>excursions</i>	3	120
<i>additional health care</i>	2	198
<i>celebrations on special occasions</i>	2	198
<i>literacy classes</i>	2	124
<i>special activities for women</i>	2	109
<i>training</i>	1	121
<i>activities for children</i>	1	93
<i>lectures/workshops</i>	1	11
<i>no information</i>	3	22

As activities for women, a meeting place, a coiffeur and the teaching of handicrafts have been proposed. Other suggestions included religious events, arts and musical competitions.

The tables show that the high priority given to social security by the workers is only partly reflected in the perceptions of the entrepreneurs, for example in comments on health care or a trust fund. The same is true concerning the workers' perception of their weak position in the enterprises. One director of a big factory was aware that many of his workers are quite unsatisfied. He explicitly welcomed the idea of the club as an opportunity for the workers to come together, discuss their problems at work and "to let out their anger" (*yitala'u infi'alathum*). Another factory director stated confusion among the workers concerning their position and entitlements and suggested lectures on the situation, rights and duties of workers.

Most entrepreneurs took complaints of their workers as something natural in industrial relations. Discontentment was seen by many as being related to factors like the difficult living conditions in 10th of Ramadan, long transportation, lack of skills and education and the "self-importance" of the

workers (*ga'shat al-'umal*) as one entrepreneur put it, i.e. their incapability to see the requirements of the production process as a whole.

In general, most of the entrepreneurs envisage the club as being a place where the workers can meet and use some facilities for recreation and leisure time. In addition, the club could offer a number of services aiming at improving the living conditions of the workers and enhancing their educational and professional skills. Most of them principally welcomed the idea of the club and expressed their readiness for support as the following table is showing:

Table (11)
Readiness of the Entrepreneurs to Support the Club

	Yes	No	May Be	Don't Know ⁹
<i>announce and encourage activities</i>	7			2
<i>financial support for a trust fund</i>	5		1	3
<i>administrative support for a trust fund</i>	2	1	1	5
<i>participation in training courses during working hours</i>	3	1	2	3
<i>participation in educational activities during working hours</i>	3	1	2	3
<i>donations</i>	2		1	6
<i>other</i>	3	1	1	4

Other potential support offered included financial contributions for excursions, the allowance for workers to participate in excursions during working hours and financial contributions to the membership fees of the club.

Even if there are differences in the perceptions of workers and entrepreneurs concerning the former's problems, needs and priorities, it can be concluded that entrepreneurs in principal welcome the establishment of a social club for workers since the alleviation of the workers' problems would benefit the companies, too. How far this support will go in practice is, however, not clear. ASSINC has probably a decisive role to play in mobilizing acceptance and support among the entrepreneurs for activities of the club.

⁹ this statement was usually given by administrative staff who did not want to answer on behalf of the owner of the enterprise

V. Recommendations

V.1. Framework and Scope of the Club

V.1.1 *Legal Form and Membership*

In accordance with the Egyptian law Nr. 32 of 1964, the social club could be run as one of ASSINC's activities since the improvement of working and living conditions in the new cities falls under its mandate and employees in small and medium scale industries in the new cities are stated as one of its target groups. ASSINC is entitled to receive donations for the social club. Income which is achieved from any of the activities of the club is allowed to be shifted to other activities.

Membership should be restricted to workers of the small industry complex in 10th of Ramadan. It should, however, be open to workers in companies who are not yet represented in ASSINC. The establishment of the club could be even an opportunity for ASSINC to attract new members. Certain activities like training courses, lectures, workshops and a trust fund could be open to non-members, too. Married workers should be granted a family membership. Membership fees should not exceed 10-20 L.E. per year. Membership cards which entitle their holders to use the basic facilities of the club and to participate in any activity at reduced prices should be issued. There may be workers who do not want to become members because they are able to participate only in few activities. They should be allowed to do so at slightly higher prices.

V.1.2 *Premises and Basic Facilities*

The local office of the Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs in 10th of Ramadan City has placed one of its premises at ASSINC's disposal which could be used for the club. The building is situated in compound Nr. 39, a residential area where also many resthouses are located. It could be reached within a twenty to thirty minutes walk from the headquarters of ASSINC. The premises in question consist of three parts with separate entrances and a court yard surrounded by a wall which could be used as a playground. They offer enough space for administration, a cafeteria, a kitchen and various purposes like meetings, educational and training courses and celebrations. Part of it could be occasionally rented out to non-members for wedding parties or the like. Since it is difficult for women to meet in the same places like male workers, special space should be reserved for female workers and the wives of workers.

V.1.3 *Administration and Organization of Activities*

ASSINC has to appoint a person who is responsible for the administration of the club as well as the organization and coordination of activities. This person should not only be competent in management and administrative tasks but should also have experience in networking since the potentials of the club depend to a considerable extent on the ability to develop innovative approaches and partnerships. The club has to be provided with an own budget.

Workers should be involved in the planning, organization and implementation of activities as early as possible in order to ensure their acceptance and participation. If the club wants to be sustainable, workers have to contribute, financially and with their efforts. Since their potential contribution is limited in terms of time and money, as many workers as possible should be encouraged to participate. They should consider the club as a project, their project, and not only as a number of services offered for passive consumption. Only if they develop a sense of ownership, creative potentials and participation can be mobilized.

V.2. How to Start

V.2.1 *First Steps*

A series of preparatory steps have to be undertaken before the club can be inaugurated. Alterations in the premises may be necessary, administrative infrastructure, the facilities for a cafeteria, a sufficient amount of chairs and tables, a blackboard, a TV set a video recorder, books and videos, sports articles and equipment for a playground for children have to be procured. A library and a videothek could be established. Books should cover a variety of areas such as literature, history, general knowledge, religion, information on workers rights as well as specialized literature connected to the different professional areas of the workers.

Preliminary arrangements have to be made for the cafeteria. It could be either run by unemployed workers as an activity of the club against a monthly salary. As an alternative, ASSINC could support interested unemployed workers to get access to credit and run the cafeteria as a commercial enterprise. In this case, a monthly rent should be paid to the club which could be used for other activities. If necessary, a grace period should be granted before rent has to be paid until the club is well established and accepted by the workers.

In addition, preparations have to be made for some starting activities. These offers should respond to some of the immediate needs of the workers in order to attract them to become members of the club. Starting activities could be, for example, the following:

- organization of a football-team and other sport activities
- provision of a daily meal for the workers. The cost for one meal should not exceed an average of 2 L.E. This could be prepared by the wives of workers against remuneration. Alternatively, the women could run the project as an independent income-generating project. In this case, ASSINC should facilitate access to donations and credit necessary to get the project off the ground. Kitchen fittings have to be procured and installed. Wives of workers who are willing to run the food project have to be identified and agreements for procedures have to be made.

- establishment of a trust fund. The trust fund should be open to workers from outside the C2 small industry complex. This would not only widen the scope and potential of the fund but also allow workers to remain members when changing their job inside 10th of Ramadan or even moving to a work place outside.
- establishment of a job placement service. This service should operate in two directions: Entrepreneurs can announce vacancies and unemployed workers offer their skills. Networking with employment offices and companies outside the small industry complex would enhance the efficiency of the service. Since skilled workers are much more likely to find a job, the job placement service should be combined with information and advice concerning possibilities for the workers to upgrade their skills.
- excursions to the seaside and places of interest in Cairo like the Pyramids and the Egyptian Museum. Therefore, contacts should be established with the Ministry of Tourism in order to make arrangements for free entrance or reduced entrance fees for places of interest like the pyramids and museums. Companies owning busses for the daily transport of the workers to their hometowns should be encouraged to allow for the use of their busses for excursions.
- offers for holidays at reduced prices. Agreements could be made with owners of rooms and apartments in tourist resorts for Egyptians. Possible places would be for example Baltim (Kafr al-Sheikh), Gamas (Daqahliya), Ras al-Barr (Dumiat) or various places in Port Said and Ismailiya. Special prices could possibly be obtained on the basis that rooms or apartments would be rented continuously for several months in summer.

V.2.2. Involvement of the Workers

A committee of workers should be formed. Its members could be found among the workers in the companies where interviews for the present study have been conducted. Due to the underrepresentation of the views of female workers in the results and suggestions therein, it is essential that female workers are either included in the committee or at least act as contact persons in companies with female workers.

The main task of the committee would be to announce the establishment of the club to colleagues in all companies in the C2 small-scale industries complex. The committee should also identify one or more workers in every enterprise who are prepared to announce and follow up future activities of the club. Furthermore, it should prepare lists together with the responsible person where names and addresses of workers can be registered who want to contribute with special skills or participate in activities like the following:

- working in or running the Café
- workers whose wives or female relatives would like to prepare daily meals for the workers against remuneration

- organization of orders for meals and collection of the money
- trainers for sport activities
- participants in literacy classes
- players of musical instruments
- workers or female relatives of workers who would offer services like hairdressing and make-up for wedding-parties or the like in the premises of the club

These lists could be distributed through the contact persons in the enterprises and again during the inauguration. Active participation of the workers could be stimulated by incentives such as reduced prices for excursions for those who engage in the organization of any activities. For this purpose a recreational fund (sanduq tarfihi) could be established. Tickets for excursions could also be granted as prizes in competitions or for graduates of literacy classes with outstanding performance. The fund could be financed by revenues of the club such as renting out rooms for festivities.

V.3. Medium and Long-Term Potentials

V.3.1. The Trust Fund

The trust fund should be an ongoing project trying to constantly widen its scope and potential. Workers should be included in its administration and supervision. The relatively high turnover in the companies and the fact that many workers are commuters pose a problem since procedures have to be found to deal with the entitlements of workers who are moving to a work place other than the C2 small industry complex in 10th of Ramadan City. As one possible means to reduce risks, entitlements could be progressive according to the period of membership in the trust fund.

The initial scheme could be the following: Members would pay a certain percentage of their monthly salary to the funds which should not exceed 2 to 5%. Entrepreneurs should contribute also a certain amount every month according to the number of their employees. Instead of being entitled to certain sums in cases of marriage or serious crisis only, the funds could provide credits with very low interest rates. The entitlements to credit could increase with the period of membership. Credit could for example be given for the purchase of long-lasting consumer goods like washing machines, refrigerators and TV sets. A number of companies producing these goods are located in 10th of Ramadan City. The club could organize collective orders and obtain discounts from these companies. The goods would be purchased by the club and the workers would pay back installments to the trust fund without interest or at very low interest rates.

Independently from other entitlements, workers could be handed out a relatively big sum of money after every five or ten years of membership. This could be either a lump sum or a percentage of the payments made. Workers



who did not receive support for special occasions during this time could be granted a larger amount. The trust fund should also seek opportunities for investing the money and constantly try to broaden its scope. Links with other trust funds and social security schemes may lead to new options and innovative initiatives. In the long run, private complementary security schemes as offered for example by the Insurance of the Arab Contractors should also be taken into consideration.

V.3.2. Health Care

ASSINC already has an agreement with the health insurance which sends a physician twice a week for two hours. Possibilities to broaden this agreement and to upgrade the existing health unit in the premises of ASSINC should be investigated. If possible, the physician should come more frequently and for a longer time and make regular, prophylactic health checks. If there are no possibilities to improve the treatment offered by the health insurance, it could be an alternative option to organize health care outside. As already stated above, this is legally possible if the employers provide at least the same level of health care as the insurance. It could be considered to engage a physician for the whole of the small industry complex. In addition, ASSINC could try to reach agreements with the private hospital in 10th of Ramadan City and specialized physicians who would treat members of the social club and their families with considerably lower charges. Similar arrangements have been already reached in other parts of Egypt. Private hospitals and clinics in some cases readily accepted such agreements due to the popularity inclined.

V.3.3. Housing

The increase of the permanent workforce and the enhancement of stable working conditions could be promoted if more workers would be encouraged to settle down permanently in 10th of Ramadan City. Workers should be supported to get access to apartments built by the government for low-income families. A possible promotion scheme could be an agreement between government authorities, employers and employees.

An example for such a scheme could be the following: The worker uses the lump sum granted to them every five years from the trust fund as a down payment for an apartment. In addition, during these five years a certain amount could be deducted from his salary every month. Government and employers would add an additional amount. The whole amount could be added to the lump sum from the trust fund and would thus probably be higher than the initial down payment required by the governmental housing department. Instead of paying a substantial sum every 3 months for 2 years before the worker can move into the flat, he should only be required to pay the initial down payment and settle the rest of the money by monthly installments. The worker and his family should be allowed to move into the apartment as soon as the down payment is made. This would alleviate the burden of paying for rent or transportation.

V.3.4. Educational and Training Center

As a long-term perspective, an educational and training center could be established. It could start as an educational and training unit which does not necessarily conduct activities itself but should primarily provide services and advice and build networks. Venues could change according to activities to make use of existing facilities in close cooperation with other institutions. The unit could cover for example the following:

- literacy classes and offers for adult education including general knowledge, language and computer courses. A certain period of educational leave could be allowed to encourage attendance
- short-term crash courses in different areas for upgrading the professional skills of workers
- awareness-raising campaigns and measures for the enhancement of operational safety and health
- activities to enhance workers' awareness of their rights and duties as well as workers' education in industrial relations in general
- measures for productivity enhancement like productivity training for workers and productivity management training for entrepreneurs

Conclusion

The establishment of a social club for workers can be envisaged as an ongoing project. The above mentioned recommendations are only preliminary ideas, which have to be studied in detail. If the project is to be developed into more than a social club in the narrow sense, changes in perceptions might be necessary.

If activities for the enhancement of productivity and skills would be included, for example, the present concepts of the role and position of workers in the production process have to be redefined. High productivity depends on a variety of factors and is essentially based on the skills and motivation of the workers. The capability and self-initiative of workers are intertwined with their status, their bonds with their work place and their working and living conditions in general. Only a worker who perceives himself as a partner in the production process rather than a subordinated and easily replaceable factor will be capable to raise his performance. This is particularly essential in labor-intensive production processes. Workers' education in industrial relations and awareness-raising activities should, therefore, form an integral part in the area of productivity enhancement.

Whatever scope ASSINC will define for the club, the active support of its members will be decisive in getting the project off the ground. Capacity building, networking and cooperation are other prerequisites for the development of the club's activities. First and foremost, its success and sustainability depends, however, on its attractivity to the workers and on their active participation. This can be secured only if the club is actually responding to their needs. Mechanisms to ensure the feed-back and involvement of the workers are, therefore, of essential importance.

Appendices

LIST OF TABLES**Part One**

Table (1)	Percentage of Enterprises Adhering to Official Procedures	9
Table (2)	Services Provided by Different Organizations to Small-Scale Enterprises	10
Table (3)	Type of Equipment and Machinery	13
Table (4)	Assessment of the Efficiency of Local Machinery by the Entrepreneurs	14
Table (5)	Maturity of Loans Offered by Commercial Banks	19
Table (6)	Numbers of Workers per Enterprise	23
Table (7)	Distribution of Workers According to Sex and Age	23
Table (8)	Educational Level of the Workers	24
Table (9)	Place of Residence of the Workers	25
Table (10)	Job Stability	26
Table (11)	Period of Employment	26
Table (12)	Employment Contracts	26
Table (13)	Availability of Insurance, Benefits and Incentives for the Workers	28
Table (14)	Payment of Wages	28
Table (15)	Wage Levels	29
Table (16)	Sources of Training	30
Table (17)	Conclusion	38

Part Two

Table (1)	Residence of the Workers	44
Table (2)	Costs for Transportation	44
Table (3)	Time Spent for Transportation Every Day	45
Table (4)	Reasons for not Moving to 10th of Ramadan City	45
Table (5)	Perceived Advantages of 10th of Ramadan City	47
Table (6)	Employment Agreements	50
Table (7)	Expected Period of Employment	50
Table (8)	Suggested Areas for Improvement	51
Table (9)	Number of Workers Registered with Public Insurance	57
Table (10)	Sources of Financial Support	58
Table (11)	Frequent Events Leading to Financial Problems	58

Part Three

Table (1)	Distribution According to Sex	68
Table (2)	Distribution According to Age	68
Table (3)	Distribution According to Personal Status	69
Table (4)	Educational Background	69
Table (5)	Place of Residents	70
Table (6)	Hometown and Transportation	70
Table (7)	Period of Employment	71
Table (8)	Breakdown of Working Hours According to Number of Workers and Enterprises	74
Table (9)	Main Problems of the Workers (Perception of the Entrepreneurs)	83
Table (10)	Most Attractive Activities of the Workers (Perception of the Entrepreneurs)	84
Table (11)	Readiness of the Entrepreneurs to Support the Club	85

LIST OF CHARTS**Part One**

Chart (1)	Educational Background of the Entrepreneurs	6
Chart (2)	Setting-up the Enterprise	8
Chart (3)	Areas of Production	12
Chart (4)	Technical Level of Equipment and Machines	13
Chart (5)	Source of Machinery	14
Chart (6)	Source of Raw Materials	16
Chart (7)	Main Markets for the Products of the Enterprises	17
Chart (8)	Main Customers of the Enterprises	17
Chart (9)	Main Sources for Loans	19

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