Wells's Communist Revision, <u>Perestroika</u>, and the New World Order Leon Stover

The two biggest buzzwords in today's vocabulary of current events are <u>perestroika</u> and "new world order", and both of them derive from language originated by H.G. Wells. "New world order" is a phrase used by George Bush, President of the United States, and it derives from a Wells book title of 1939, The New World Order. 1

<u>Perestroika</u>, or "reform" in plain English, is a word used by Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the former Soviet Union, in speaking of a renewed Communist Party. Or so he used to speak. His favourite word was retired to the graveyard of defunct political slogans and instantly forgotten even as this very paragraph was being written.

Following a failed military coup he, on 24th August 1991, resigned as General Secretary of the Communist Party, disbanded its leadership and seized its assets, actions validated a few days later, on 29 August, by majority vote in the new Soviet Parliament. Thus ended seventy-four years of Party rule in the now dissolving U.S.S.R. Up until that moment, however, Gorbachev had talked about Communist reform in language closely following that proposed by Wells in what he called his "Communist Revision".2

If the phrase "new world order" is clearly Wellsian, the rhetoric of <u>perestroika</u> is no less Wellsian, as will be disclosed in due course. For the moment it is enough to note that these two buzzwords are connected by events arising from the Revolution of 1989 in eastern Europe.

The Revolution of 1989, billed in the press as the "Collapse of Communism", was highlighted by the fall of the Berlin Wall. By that time that countries of eastern Europe - Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Romania - had moved toward a market economy and multiparty politics in open revolt against political and economic controls imposed by Moscow. They did so, however, by choosing to misread Moscow's policy of perestroika: instead of honoring the new orthodoxy of reform Communism, these Warsaw Pact colonies interpreted perestroika as a licence to de-Communize themselves.

Lest there be any doubt as to what President Gorbachev meant by <u>perestroika</u>, he made it plain when he said, "We should do everything in order to reform the Communist Party, in order to give it a sort of kiss of life". Or again, "I will fight to the end for the renewal of this Party". So he spoke on 22nd August in his news conference reporting on the coup that had taken him prisoner. Two days later, pressed by co-coup survivor Boris Yeltsin, President of the independent Russian Republic, he disavowed those words.

The example of the East Bloc had at last impacted the Soviet Union itself, with unintended consequences that are yet unfolding. But these consequences - the breaking away of the Union's constituent republics and the call for democracy and market economics within them - were foredestined in the Revolution of 1989.

Whereupon the President of the United States, against the backdrop of the Berlin Wall being dismantled, declared the Cold War over. Soon after, in August 1990, President Bush entered upon the Gulf War to chastise Iraq for its aggression against Kuwait, doing so with the consent of the United Nations, which included the consenting vote of the Soviet Union. This post-Cold War arrangement, ending a bi-polar world of two contending superpowers, Present Bush marked as the start of a new era he called "the new world order".

This phrase had been recommended to the President by his National Security Adviser, Brent Scowcroft, who is evidently a Wells reader. Wellsian, too, is the 100-hour war in the Gulf that smashed the Iraqi aggressor with superior technical might. The facile defeat of Sadam Hussein recalls the war for peace waged by John Cabal and his United Airmen in Things to Come, the film of 1936 in which they "clean up" Rudolf, the last of the war brigands, and impose a "new order" called the pax aeronautica.

What President Bush means by a "new world order" is a <u>pax Americana</u>. He denies this, and says he rather means a "<u>Pax Universalis</u>" - as if the whole world, in the abstract, will act as its own policeman without American leadership.

Wells himself probably would not find a <u>pax Americana</u> objectionable. He first used the phrase "new world order" in a work of 1935 titled, <u>The New America: the New World.</u> In this book, having despaired that the heritage of the Russian Revolution under Stalin would not lead on to the world revolution promised by Lenin, he concluded that the world state of his pre-vision was going to speak English and not Russian. Now he voices "the hope that America will lead the world towards the organised world order". Indeed, he predicts that, "If America does not go high and resolute and proud, consciously taking the leadership of mankind in the realisation of a new way of living [the new world order], she will go low and she will drag the world down with her".4

So much for America. But what went wrong with Russia?

In <u>Phoenix</u>, a late work of 1942, Wells wrote: "I have always played the part of a candid friend to the Russian [Soviet] system".5 A <u>candid</u> friend, indeed. Wells is virtually unique among apologists for the Soviet Union in not falling for its humanitarian and democratic bromides, as did the likes of G.B. Shaw and Beatrice and Sidney Webb. Wells rather exhibits a very tough-minded, not to say morally callous, viewpoint in his outright endorsement of totalitarian statism. At the very outset of Stalin's forced grain deliveries in the Ukraine, Wells could say, "No vote famine has broken out.... You do not find haggard peasants wandering about in search of a polling booth".6 Nor did Wells close his eyes to the gulag system, as did others. Instead, he came right out and said:

Maybe we over-estimated the value of that idle and slack, go-as-you-please discussion that we English folk enjoy under our democratic regime. The concentration camp of today may prove after all to be the austere training ground of the new freedom.7

That "new freedom", of course, is freedom from the polling booth.

Acting as a friendly critic from the start, he had earlier summed up his critique of the Soviet system by saying, "It is a modern method without a modern idea". 8 He complained that the Soviets made propaganda for their regime on "the impossible proposition that it is the prophesied Marxist social revolution which has happened in Russia", when, in fact, a very different kind of revolution had taken place: a managerial or technocratic one. For that reason Marxism, being a "democratic socialism", was an out-dated idea not in the least appropriate to the modern methods of "state capitalism" by which the regime actually operated. 10

In this Wells was quite correct. Lenin, the state founder, had himself proposed to seize power for a technocratic regime. On the eve of the Bolshevik takeover, he wrote in State and Revolution (1917): "The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory". The result, society run like a vast production company, is what unfriendly critics have called the U.S.S.R., Inc. But Wells looked on the system with approval, especially when Stalin proposed to improve on it with his first Five Year Plan. Said Wells of the Plan when it was announced: "The whole State was to become one great departmentalised business, a single rationalised system.... of which there will be one owner, one single Capitalist - the State - and everyone else will be an employee.... or a prisoner of that supreme power". 11 A far cry from Marxist democracy, Wells denominated this system as a case of "autocratic state capitalism", 12 his own utopian ideal, in which the state serves as the "universal buyer and seller". 13. This latter phrase describes exactly what President Gorbachev had in mind when, yielding to democratic forces calling for a market economy, he qualified the idea in the reformist language of perestroika by speaking of a "socialist market" - which, of course, nullifies the whole idea of a free market by using different words to re-define the same old centralised economic controls.

Wells's critique of the Soviet regime, then, amounts to this: he praises it for its practice of "ultramodern State Capitalism" 14 but faults it for the lack of an equally modern idea to animate it. The false language of Marxist rhetoric is no way to advance the Soviet cause world-wide, and Wells cast up this bit of friendly advice to both Lenin and Stalin.

Wells met with Lenin in the Kremlin in 1920, and the first thing Lenin asked of him was: "To make it [the world revolution] a success the Western world must join in. Why doesn't it?" Wells replied that Marxism itself was the problem. Besides being unattractive to the rest of the world, it was not in fact the doctrine by which the Soviet Union was covertly governed. So why falsify a perfectly good method of rule with a perfectly bad idea? Why the misleading cover story? Better, Wells advised: preach what you practice.

But in this "very uphill argument" with Lenin, as Wells reports it, he found that Lenin had "tied himself years ago to the Marxist dogma of the inevitable class war, the downfall of Capitalist order as a prelude to reconstruction, the proletarian dictatorship, and so forth".16 Whereas Wells had argued: "Big business is by no means antipathetic to Communism. The larger business grows the more it approximates to Collectivism. It is the upper road of the few instead of the lower road of the masses to Collectivism".17 And yet here was Lenin, the founder of state capitalism in the Soviet Union, himself presiding over its "directive elite," the Communist Party, and he continued to talk the wildly inappropriate language of Marx's mass democracy.18

Lenin listened to Wells' advice with close attention, an attitude captured by a photographer from the Foreign Ministry in a photo published in Russia in the Shadows, the Wells book of 1920 reporting his "uphill" debate of that year. Since this photo seems to figure in the history of perestroika, it is worth describing here. Taken in Lenin's Kremlin office, it shows the head and shoulders of both men, Lenin behind his desk, index finger laid against thoughtfully inclined head, as he attends to the talkative Wells on the other side.

In 1934 Wells visited Stalin, offered the same advice - preach what you practise - and got the same Marxist comback, only more of it - four hours worth of it, in fact. This is recorded in a pamphlet titled, Stalin-Wells Talk, 19 although it was not much of a dialogue; Wells was hard pressed to get a word in edgewise as he sat there listening to Stalin sounding like a gramophone, repeating the Marxist pieties over and over again. Frustrated by this futile encounter with Stalin, even more the class-war fanatic than Lenin, he returned home and later that year began drafting the film treatment of Things to Come. It is not far-fetched to think of Wells conceiving this film as a big-budget rebuttle instructing the Soviets in the more authentic ideology of his Communist Revision, which amounts to Communism minus Marx. The most expensive film ever mounted to 1936, the date of its release, it was impossible to ignore. Wells himself called it a "propagandist film [for] Wellsism".20

Wellsism, as it turns out, reduces to the pre-Marxist socialism of Henri Saint-Simon. Saint-Simon is variously dubbed the father of technocracy, state socialism, and state capitalism alike: the terms make no difference whatsoever, and they are used interchangeably by Wells. That Wells adhered to Saint-Simonism is implicit in much of his work, but in his autobiography he is quite explicit about it. Here he grants to Auguste Comte "a sort of priority he had in sketching the modern outlook,"21 meaning the "modern idea" that Wells urged the Soviets to openly declare. Comte was Henri Saint-Simon's number one disciple and systematizer of his voluminous writings; and so when Wells credits Comte with shaping his outlook on socialism, that is to identify Wellsism with Saint-Simonism.

The name Saint-Simon himself gave to his doctrine was <u>industrialisme</u>, and it was only later, in 1832, that yet another one of his disciples renamed it <u>socialisme</u>.22 In Saint-Simonian or Old Testament socialism, Capital and Labour are given to collaborate in the collective business of industrial production, whereas the New Testament socialism of Karl Marx is a class-war doctrine pitting Labour <u>against</u> Capital.

For that reason Wells found Marxist dogma wholly unsuitable as a guiding ideology for the Soviet system. The trouble with both Lenin and Stalin was, they practised one brand of socialism (Saint-Simonism) and preached another (Marxism). No wonder, with this kind of confusing double-talk, the Russian Revolution failed to ignite the world revolution.

In the event, Lenin knew his Old Testament socialism well enough. Otherwise he could not have proposed to run society like a production company, as he did in State and Revolution when he said: "The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory".23 This is a conscious echo of Saint-Simon's basic teaching, as put in his most famous maxim: "All men will work; they will regard themselves as labourers attached to one workshop [and the] Supreme Council of Newton will direct their works". But, he added, making allowance for prisoners of the gulag camps founded by Lenin: "Anybody who does not obey the orders will be treated by the others as a quadruped", that is, as anti-social animals. In the future society ruled by the Council of Newton, located in Paris, the metropolitan centre of a scientific-industrial world state, the "immoral" concept of individual rights will no longer obtain, for their will be only duties to perform, orders to obey.

In this light, the Soviet Union's command-and-administration system is a veritable embodiment of Saint-Simon's table of organisation, which is worth looking at because it illustrates what Wells meant by his friendly criticism of the system. When he said that the Soviet Union was based on "a modern method without a modern idea", he meant that the system was a Saint-Simonian one in practice

but lacked a Saint-Simonian ideology to match. By way of contrast, the future world projected in Things to Come, called by Wells the Modern State, is a Saint-Simonian technocracy with no trace of Marxism in its doctrinal guidance. Indeed, the Modern State is explicitly Saint-Simonian in its ideology: nothing but collective duties to obey and no immoral individual rights. Or, as Wells puts it, the Modern State is "the whole duty of Man", under which those "impossible 'rights'" of the democratic order are cleared away. 24

In Saint-Simon's table of organisation, the Council of Newton seats top-ranking members of the Estate of Direction comprised of savants and industrial chiefs. The savants are scientists who articulate policy and the industrialists execute it. Together they govern the Estate of Labour, working members of the proletariat, in the collective interests of production. The word "proletariat", by the way, is of Saint-Simon's coinage, a word taken by Marx to name the ruling class, not to say the sole existing class, in his post-revolutionary society; whereas it is a subordinate class, under the control of planners and industrial managers, in Saint-Simonian doctrine.

The Soviet system is the same. Communist Party officers are the savants, government officials are the managers. Together they form a ranked co-partnership of party and government, in the name of the State, ruling over the citizenry that comprises the People. In Soviet locution, State and People are the two main divisions of society, corresponding to the Estates of Direction and Labour, although Marxist rhetoric conflates them under a Dictatorship of the Proletariat. In the Soviet system, the State is a dual structure of party and government, with the former deciding policy and the latter executing it. The separation of functions here is clearly indicated by the fact that each has its own press (now independent as of August 1991): Pravda for the party, Izvestia for the government, which is secondary to the party, and not the other way around as one might expect. But such is the Saint-Simonian table of organisation in action. Further, top members from both party and government sit on the Politburo (since abolished), over and above which stands the dictator, Lenin or Stalin, who is the Great Legislator of Saint-Simon's Council of Newton.

A similar scheme obtains for the Modern State in Things to Come. The Great Legislator and his Council of Newton appears as Oswald Cabal, President of the World Council of Direction. Since Wells elsewhere has named Saint-Simon's two Estates of Direction and Labour as basic to his world formula, 25 they are given in Things to Come; a Council of Direction implies the body of workingmen it directs. As for the three Saint-Simonian classes - the savants and managers of Direction, and the proletariat of Labour - these are translated by Wells into the temperamental types that he defined in his Modern Utopia of 1905, in which a world party-state is run by a directive elite called Samurai, after the ruling nobility of Tokugawa-era Japan. The film's imagery directly alludes to this novel in the dress worn by members of the World Council: their upper garments are modelled after the wide-shouldered court costume of the Samurai nobility, called kata-ginu in Japanese.

The Wellsian Samurai of A Modern Utopia are distinguished by two temperamental types. First the Poietic or creative type, the think-uppers of the collective state-idea, corresponding to the savants. Next is the Kinetic or executive type, the carry-outers of plans made by the poietics, and they correspond to Saint-Simon's industrial managers. Together, the poietics and kinetics dominate the common run of men, the Saint-Simonian proletariat, whom Wells tags as intellectually Dull and morally Base types: too dull to understand the state-idea or too base to wish to understand it.26

In this respect they are incapable of serving the collective welfare, which is the object of the state-idea originated by Oswald Cabal, the Great Legislator, without its being imposed on them with the "forcible conformities" 27 of a police-and-propaganda regime. Says a Cabal-like figure in the novel on which the film is based,

It is no good asking people what they want... That is the error of democracy. You have first to think out what they ought to want if society is to be saved. They you have to tell them what they want and see that they get it.28

Of course, what they get when this philosophy of state socialism, or state capitalism, is applied in real life is nothing but totalitarian poverty. The fallacy of Saint-Simonism is the belief that the state alone is capable of producing wealth, and that is why the Soviet Union had gone bankrupt. Wells himself compressed this fallacy in a punchy apothegm of just seven words, during his college debate on socialism on Friday evening, 15th October, 1886. At that time, in the gas-lit basement of the Royal School of Mines, and wearing his red tie, he said: "The State produces and the individual consumes".29

At all events, to summarise the above parallels, the following schema may be drawn up:

Saint-Simon	Soviet System	"Things to Come"	
Great Legislator	Dictator	Oswald Cabal	
Council of Newton	Politburo	Council of World Direction	
Direction	State	Direction	functions
 savants managers 	1. party 2 government	 poetics kinetics 	 command administration
Labour 3. proletariat	People 3. citizenry	Labour 3. dull and base	3. obedience

And just to drive home the point that Wellsism is overtly an ideology in support of state capitalism, Things to Come provides the following conspicuous detail. One of the kinetics or industrial managers on the World Council of Direction is Raymond Passworthy, head of "General Fabrics". 30 His grandfather had been an owner of textile mills under the old system of private-profit capitalism. Now, with the utopian arrival of statist capitalism his grandson heads a government bureau in charge of textile production throughout the world. General Fabrics recalls the biggest of the vertical organisations or "trusts" of Lenin's Supreme Economic Council, or "trust of trusts", which retained under Stalin its title as the Commissariat of Textiles. But the difference is, Raymond Passworthy's office in a command economy under Oswald Cabal is not disguised by any democratic Marxist double-talk.31

To what extend this big-budget dramatisation of the Wellsian Communist Revision made any impact on the Soviet leadership cannot be known. But it can be no accident, as things used to go in the Soviet Union, that the "Lenin in the Kremlin" Festival of 1970 freatured the parading through Red Square of a huge blow-up of that photograph of Lenin listening attentively to Wells. Perestroika, evidently,

was already in the works.

And finally, after 1985, it came out into the open as President Gorbachev introduced "humankind interests" as more important than "class struggle". In this manifestation of Wellsian language in the name of perestroika, revived from advice given to both Lenin and Stalin, nothing more of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat has been heard. But too late.

Not even Wells's Communist Revision sufficed to kiss the Communist Party back to life. Barely two weeks ago [from the date of this conference], on September 6, Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin both sat together in the Kremlin for ABC's live National Town Meeting and took televised questions from the American public. Said Yeltsin of Communism, it "was a tragedy for our people". Gorbachev went even further, saying that its failure "is a lesson not only for our people, but for all peoples".

So goes the New Russian Revolution of 1991, with Lenin's wax dummy soon to be buried in St. Petersburg - the city that no longer bears his name. And so ends the revolutionary legacy of the figure that Wells had raised up as "twentieth century's one outstanding statesman".32

Now it is only Communism's chief enemy, its glavny vrag of the past, that speaks for H.G. Wells in its talk about a New World order.

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Update

On 6th May 1992, Mikhail Gorbachev spoke from the same podium at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, where Sir Winston Churchill on 5th March 1946 first warned of an "iron curtain" fallen across the Continent.

Much speculation has been given to the origin of this memorable phrase, all of it mistaken. The fact is that Churchill, an avowed Wells reader, remembered "iron curtain" from The Food of the Gods (1904; Book III, ch. 4:1).

And just as Churchill opened the Cold War with a Wellsian phrase, the former Soviet president closed it with another one. He called for a "new world order", as had President Bush with American leadership in mind, only he centered it on a reformed United Nations with teeth given to the Security Council. A chastened Communist without a Party, or without a territorial base from which to advance the world revolution, he now urges the U.N. to enforce "world democracy" by using "measures of compulsion".

Not forgotten, then, is the World Council of Direction in <u>Things to Come</u>. Wells&Communist Revision lives on beyond <u>perestroika</u> with support from the Gorbachev Foundation in Moscow, to which all speaking and writing fees of its popular namesake are devoted.

Notes

- 1. The New World Order (London: Secker & Warburg, 1939)
- 2. After Democracy (London: Watts & Co. 1932) p.35
- 3. The New America: The New World (London: The Cresset Press 1935) p.17
- 4. <u>Ibid</u> pp. 81ff, 96.
- 5. Phoenix (London: Secker & Warburg, 1942) p.62
- 6. Democracy under Revision (London: Leonard & Virginia Woolf, 1927) p.29
- "The World Today and Tomorrow?" <u>Sunday Chronicle</u> (2nd April, 1938)
 Full page newspaper article, in the author's collection, heretofore unknown to Wellsian bibliography.
- 8. The Way the World is Going (London: Ernest Benn, 1928) p.29
- 9. Russia in the Shadows (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1920) p. 145
- 10. Experiment in Autobiography (New York: Macmillan, 1934) p.215
- 11. After Democracy (London: Watts & Co. 1932) p.181

 It is ironical to note, in light of the Soviet Union's fracturing along the lines of its national minorities, that over and above his praise for the Five Year Plan Wells opined: "Stalin's greatest achievement, when at last history weights him in the balance, will be found I think in his settlement of the minority difficulty in Russia for good and all" See '42 to '44 (London: Secker & Warburg, 1944) p.52
- What Are We to Do with Our Lives? (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1931) p.60
- 13. The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind (Garden City, New York Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1931) p.557
- 14. <u>Ibid</u>.
- 15. Russia in the Shadows p.155
- 16. <u>lbid</u>. pp.163, 162ff
- Russia in the Shadows p.178
 Note that the Air Dictatorship in Things to Come establishes a "world system" tagged as "a vast business octopus". See the novel on which the film is in part based,
 The Shape of Things to Come (New York: Macmillan, 1933) p.289
- 18. See Experiment in Autobiography p.215

- 19. Stalin-Wells Talk (London: New Statesman and Nation) 1934
- 20. H.G. Wells in Love: Postscript to "An Experiment in Autobiography" ed. G.P. Wells (London: Faber & Faber, 1984) pp.73, 172
- Experiment in Autobiography p.562.
 On Wells as a Saint-Simonian socialist, see Leon Stover The Prophetic Soul:
 A Reading of H.G. Wells's "Things to Come" (Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland, 1987)
 Introduction, pp 1-26.

 This book contains, as Appendix I, the film treatment of 1934 titled, Whither Mankind?
- 22. The disciple in question is one H. Joncieres, in the Saint-Simonian journal <u>Le Globe</u> for 2nd February 1832. The English word "socialism" with a communal spin to its meaning, did not appear until 1837 in Robert Owen's <u>New Moral World</u>. This is the heritage of the later Marxists, in German socialismus, not from French socialisme.
- 23. Other Lenin quotes to the same effect include the following:

 "Unquestioning Subordination to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of processes organised on the pattern of large-scale machine industry". By that he means that "factory discipline will extend to the whole of society," the Saint-Simonian idea in a nutshell. Cited in Leon Stover The Prophetic Soul, p.14.
- 24. The Shape of Things to Come pp.398, 107
- 25. The Elements of Reconstruction (London: Nisbet, 1916) p.100
- 26. See A Modern Utopia (London: Chapman & Hall, 1905) Chapter 9.
- 27. Anticipations (New York and London: Harper & Brothers) 1901, p.281
- 28. The Shape of Things to Come, p.254
- 29. 'Democratic Socialism' Normal School of Science and Royal School of Mines Debating Society, Abstract of Proceedings, in The Science Schools Journal 1 [December 1886] p24. Even as a third-year student at the Normal School, Wells was an advocate of Saint-Simonism. The topic of the debate was "Democratic Socialism" and Wells clearly took a stand for the other, pre-Marxist brand of socialism, which is not communal but statist. Or, as he bluntly put it: "The corner-stone of socialism is the great principle of the merging of the individual in the State". Nothing mystical about this, he explained; it means "the principle that life is the property of the State". And that the "supreme government" of such a regime must rest with a "Council of the head managers of State exertion Production [and] Distribution". Wells was to repeat this formula to the letter in his 1931 work of social economics, The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind when he spoke of the State acting as "the universal buyer and seller" [p.557] Again, "The State produces, the individual consumes". Nobody ever said it better than the young H.G. Wells, the red-tie wearing errorist of 1886.

- See shot number 846 of the release script, published as Appendix II in Leon Stover The Prophetic Soul p.275
- 31. Alas, nobody at the conference raised the question of Plato's <u>Republic</u> anent the Sain-Simonian table of organisation. Saint-Simon surely knew his Plato, and Wells is quite explicit regarding his debt to same. Indeed, he credits Plato with being "the father of the Modern State", and adds that "members of the Communist Party were extremely like [his] Guardians (<u>The Shape of Things to Come</u> p.125). Thus the Soviet system is ultimately a realisation of the Platonic utopia, as is the Wellsian world state in <u>Things to Come</u>. And Wells's temperamental types, in <u>A Modern Utopia</u>, are nothing if not a psychological translation of the different types of soul stuff diagnosed by Plato. His table organisation, from which all the others derive, looks like this:

Philosopher King

Nocturnal Council

Guardians	soul stuff	functions
1. teachers	wisdom	propaganda
2. soldiers	force	coercion
Citizens		
3. producers	desire	obedience

32. The Shape of Things to Come (London: Hutchinson, 1933) p.26.
This line, and the paragraph to which it belongs, does not occur in the New York edition.

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