

Newly formed 'Révolution écosocialiste' organization: A strategic perspective for uniting ecosocialists in Québec

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Newly formed 'Révolution écosocialiste' organization proposes a green, ecosocialist and democratic program for building a mass movement in the 21st century

Introduction

Ecosocialist activists in Québec have formed a new organization, Révolution écosocialiste (RE). Climate & Capitalism is pleased to publish our English translation of the group's Basis of Unity.

Interviewed by the magazine Nouveaux Cahiers du Socialisme, Benoit Renaud explained that he and the other signatories felt that an earlier networking group, the Réseau écosocialiste founded in 2013, was no longer the activist organization they had originally envisaged, and instead functioned as little more than a "talk shop" (lieu d'échange). The new organization, he said, would succeed the Réseau, which will now be dissolved. "The mass mobilizations of recent years over climate change and the emergence of more radical groups within this movement (like Extinction Rebellion) indicate to us that the future of the struggle for socialism will probably unfold to a large degree through the political development of the ecology movement."

Asked about the new group's relation to Québec solidaire, Renaud said that while they thought the electoral and parliamentary action of QS was essential, it should be "subordinate to the development of social struggles." A mass ecosocialist party is needed, but whether QS could become such a party was an open question, he said. As a result of its electoral success, the party was becoming bureaucratized, a small minority of "political specialists" tending to substitute for the membership and to see themselves as the party leaders. Révolution écosocialiste would fight to get the party to adopt "horizontal, inclusive and participationist structures," and to help make QS more a "party of the streets," not just the ballot box.

It would also seek to radicalize the party's orientation, to make it a party of system change. "But we are not 'revolutionaries'. Révolution écosocialiste wants to build the movements that will enable us to overcome the present crisis of civilization."

In an accompanying article on "a green, ecosocialist and democratic plan for the 21st century," founding members Bernard Rioux, Roger Rashi, Ginette Lewis, Lucie Mayer, Jessica Squires, Benoit Renaud, and Hassoun Karam critique the Legault government's "green economy plan" — "a smokescreen" — and outline their idea of "a green plan that opens the way to a fundamental transformation." It includes nationalization of the energy industry, socialization of the banks and financial institutions, and massive public investment in green, quality jobs.

The founding members have also published proposals on the structures and functioning of Révolution écosocialiste. They plan to hold general membership meetings "every two months or

more often as needed.” Among the proposed structures are an editorial committee to manage an RE web site, and an educational committee, each with at least four members elected on a gender-parity basis. As well there will be a women’s caucus.

Révolution écosocialiste will be publicly launched on December 15; it can be contacted at info.ecosocialisme.ca.

Richard Fidler

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ECOSOCIALIST REVOLUTION: BASIS OF UNITY

Ecosocialist Revolution contributes to the construction of a socialist movement in which a mass socialist party will be called upon to play a key role. This requires a renewal of the trade union movement and the development of combative and democratic social movements. To be successful, our campaigns — electoral, union or social — must be situated within an overall strategy, which must itself be based on an analysis of the economic and political system and our historical situation. Our basis of unity, which unites us, presents our strategic perspective and our vision of the socialist movement to be built.

A. For socialism

A1 We want to help build a socialist world that will end the exploitation and oppression that are inherent in capitalism. Everyone has the right to a free and fully creative life. In a socialist society, a democratically planned and administered economy will enable us to meet the challenge of climate change and to preserve our ecosystems and biodiversity. A socialist democracy will redefine politics by extending democracy to our workplaces and within our communities.

B. The strategic centrality of the class struggle to overthrow capitalism

B1 Capitalism is based on exploitation and commodification. Capitalist society is divided into classes. A small minority dominates the economy and monopolizes the means of production and distribution from which the great majority subject to this domination is dispossessed. The resources to which people are entitled and what they must do to survive are determined by their social class, but also by their racialized group, gender identity, and ability.

B2 Capitalist firms are in competition and must therefore maximize profits by reducing costs, intensifying labour and adopting technologies that increase its productivity while making it more precarious. Financial companies are also competing for a share of household debt and developing more and more murky financial products for this purpose. This frantic race for profitability in the context of an unplanned economy leads to recurring crises, both economic and ecological.

B3 While immense wealth is produced, the majority of the population struggles to make ends meet, and our access to what is necessary for a dignified and fulfilling life remains far removed from what it could be. At the top, society is dominated by the capitalist class — a small minority of large property owners and their managers. The profits of this class are derived from the efforts of the vast majority, the working class.

B4 The profits of those above depend on the work of the vast majority below. This gives us enormous potential power, therefore. We have the power to stop production and the flow of profits, or to create a political crisis with a public service strike. We are the vast majority of the population and we have the power to transform a political system that protects the power of capital.

B5 Improving our lives now and eventually putting an end to capitalism requires the mobilization of this immense potential power and poses the central strategic question of the organization of the working class — the construction of its unity in all its diversity. This project is at the heart of our strategic perspective.

C. Against the other systems of exploitation

C1 Capitalism and the other systems of exploitation — racism, colonialism and patriarchy — are co-constituted; that is, they are interdependent and feed on each other. Employers use sexist or racist tactics to divide their employees. Beyond these tactics, the normal process of capitalist accumulation inevitably fuels racial and gender divisions within society. Conversely, the division of society into classes is also modulated by patriarchy, racism and various other systems of oppression and exploitation (castes, capacities, religions, heteronormativity, cis-sexism, colonialism, poverty, etc.). In particular, class membership is determined in part by gender and even more largely by race.

C2 Fighting against patriarchy and racism requires confronting the power of capital because it opposes, for example, the taxation of its profits that is necessary to finance a network of public, free and quality childcare centers, or because it helps maintain the hyper-precarious status of migrant workers. Conversely, effectively confronting capital involves attacking patriarchy, racism, and all the forms of oppression and exploitation that divide us. In this, we recognize that the sexual and racial division of labor (including self-employment and underemployment) as well as racist and patriarchal violence (including police, domestic and sexual violence) are central issues that cannot be solved only by struggle against capitalism.

C3 Ecofeminism must also be part of our analysis of oppressions. If the capitalist can transform the earth into a commodity by extracting natural wealth and can mutilate, burn, or sterilize the earth, so he likewise treats women as a commodity, and people who identify as women suffer rape, violence, assault and femicide.

C4 In order to build a truly free society, the socialists therefore aim to end all oppressions and forms of exploitation. To achieve this goal, we strive for the organization of workers as a class united in all its diversity. This implies balancing the demands of class, gender and ethnic origins.

C5 We stress the importance of struggles for demands from which the entire working class will benefit — free and quality public health and education systems; the right to decent housing; the strengthening of trade union rights, etc. — to the extent that they also make it possible to attack other oppressions and forms of exploitation. These demands are particularly beneficial for those who identify as women and for people of color, as they reduce the competition for resources that fuels prejudice and divisions within the working class. By contributing to the socioeconomic security of oppressed and super-exploited people, they thereby reduce the power of the oppressors and exploiters, including that of abusive bosses, violent spouses, abusive government practices or racist landlords.

C6 These demands, which will benefit all workers, are however insufficient. Socialists must also directly address the forms of domination and exploitation that divide the working class and we must support the autonomous movements of oppressed groups. In Quebec this includes, among others (but not exclusively!) the fight against violations of the rights of racialized minorities, for example

Islamophobia; the defense and extension of the right to abortion; the fight against the sexual division of labor and violence against women; support of Indigenous struggles; defense of the rights of LGBTQ + people; and defense of the rights of people with disabilities.

C7 The socialists must help turn these struggles into mass mobilizations and work to integrate their demands into an overall strategy. While some argue that the organization and autonomous struggles of people who identify as women or of racialized people undermine class solidarity, we believe on the contrary that they can nourish it. The experience of collective power of people who identify as women and / or racialized people in struggle can lead them to aim for broader class solidarity, and inspire other groups to build our power in the face of capital. Solidarity is contagious.

C8 Our search for class unity, on the other hand, leads us to reject the perspective which would simply attribute oppressions and the various forms of exploitation to erroneous or harmful ideas rather than target their systemic sources, and which resort to shaming tactics in order to transform behaviour. Such a perspective makes emancipation dependent on the goodwill of the oppressor and undermines class solidarity and struggles against exploitation and oppression by dividing our forces. Having said that, we consider the concept of privilege, as well as the theory and activism informed by this concept, to be compatible with a socialist approach, and we recognize that a political group must have an internal and formalized policy in order to fight against the oppression within it.

C9 To fight against other systems of exploitation, the groups concerned must necessarily organize and fight on an autonomous basis. For example, history shows us that the demands, the realities of women, the violence they suffer are not resolved only by the abolition of capitalism. Patriarchy has for too long survived different forms of social organization. It is necessary that the groups concerned organize themselves on their own bases and remain organized throughout the various struggles, both at the very base in the unions, political parties, neighborhoods, and community groups in caucus-like forms and on regional, national, continental and global bases in broad, gender-specific and democratic coalitions. Women-only forms are essential to enable the groups concerned to take their place, to develop their confidence and to combat the violence suffered. This is the best way to make clear the stigma left by the different systems of exploitation and oppression.

C10 A socialist organization that claims to be feminist must work to build such autonomous movements. For example, socialist activists who are involved in the struggles of the women's movement work to strengthen this unity and solidarity of all people who identify as women without exception. But as socialists, they must also advance demands that challenge patriarchy and capitalism and create within this autonomous movement a class-struggle current. The World March of Women brings together groups, coalitions and women's centres internationally and is the embryo of such a movement. And on the basis of this autonomous movement, it is possible to organize mass movements bringing together primarily people who identify as women. The Chilean and Argentine examples are important demonstrations of this.

D. The neoliberal offensive against our gains

D1 Anchoring our struggles against exploitation and oppression in the current historical context requires taking note of the defeat of the working class, a defeat which put an end to the struggles and achievements of the post-war boom. Trade union rights are under attack, union membership stagnates or shrinks, the number of strikes is at record lows, and workers are forced into unending concessions. Many social movements have limited themselves to their narrow corporate interests and been co-opted by the State. The social democratic parties have taken a decidedly neoliberal turn, and the communist parties continue their long decline to insignificance. For the first time since the end of the 19th century, the working class in many countries no longer has parties capable of expressing their interests.

D2 Neoliberalism has a material anchorage and is not just an ideology — it is the politics of Capital but it is not encountering effective mass resistance. The defeat and fragmentation of the working class leads to a degradation of working and living conditions. It entails as well a stagnation in real wages, even as labor productivity continues to rise. The erosion of social programs and the commodification of public services encourage recourse to debt. All of this fuels the growth of inequalities and prompts the search for regressive individual solutions such as tax cuts.

D3 The economic situation is characterized by a triple crisis. The Great Recession of 2008 (as well as the slowdown in growth and the period of austerity it opened), the ecological and climate emergency, and the crisis of liberal democracies (parties succeed each other in office, neoliberal policies remain, and the far right gains ground!) are among the many dimensions of the growing loss of legitimacy of the political and economic systems in place.

D4 It is in this context that many large-scale mobilizations have taken place in recent years. For lack of organizations and strategic perspectives that would allow it, however, most of these struggles produce little or nothing in the way of an accumulation of popular anticapitalist forces.

D5 After an initial impetus in this direction in Latin America, we have more recently seen a return of resistance movements towards party politics in the countries of the Global North. Québec solidaire, Bernie Sanders, the Labour Party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, and Podemos are just some of the examples. These are promising signs that may allow for better articulation and defense of the interests of the working classes.

D6 Social mobilizations and party politics must, however, find a way to express themselves within an overall strategy.

E. To advance towards socialism

E1 We know that winning elections is not the same as taking power. Without an organized class of workers (primarily in the workplace, where our potential power is greatest), a socialist electoral victory means little.

E2 We reject a strategy limited to gradual reforms which does not contemplate the necessary break with capitalism. Fighting for reforms is essential but reformism, which aims to administer the capitalist economy to the advantage of both capital and workers, means locking ourselves into a dead end. Reformism seeks to support the profitability and productivity of companies in order to create the resources necessary to finance better wages and social programs ... even as the support of profitability and productivity under capitalism requires slashing wages, intensifying work, and liberalizing markets. While some progress can be achieved during a period of growth, crises — recurrent and inevitable under capitalism — will eventually impose austerity policies. These are the “automatic” and inevitable disciplinary mechanisms of capitalism.

E3 Many historical examples clearly show the impossibility of a reformist approach: the social democratic government of the 1970s in Sweden, the socialist government of François Mitterrand in the early 1980s, the government of the NDP in Ontario in the early 1990s, or the one formed by Syriza in Greece, from 2015 to 2019, to name just a few. All of these left governments abandoned their progressive agendas in favor of austerity measures.

E4 There are reasons for this. In addition to the disciplinary mechanisms already mentioned, the capitalists, if their interests are threatened, will lead — or threaten to lead — an “investment strike.” A socialist government will also be exposed to sabotage by the senior civil service, the command structures of the police and armed forces — which may lead to the end of democracy, as was the

case in Chile in 1973.

E5 Conversely, we also reject an ultra-leftist posture that substitutes the adventures of a small number of activists in place of organized and democratic mass movements. We reject a sectarian and purely propagandist political posture that adopts an air of radicalism but which can rally only a small minority of people who are already convinced.

E6 A break with capitalism is clearly not on the political agenda in the short term. The question is therefore how we can advance towards this rupture.

E7 The work of socialist organization must be directed towards the great majority of workers who are not yet politically active. We need to get people to openly confront the capitalists and their politicians on the basis of immediate demands, while linking each specific immediate issue to its root cause: capitalism. Our aim is to create a mass movement that forces the elites to make concessions — and eventually ousts them from power.

E8 Accordingly, our strategic perspective aims to combine the work of social mobilization and electoral work within a socialist outlook. Our essential task is to participate in the reconstruction of the power of the working class, which will ultimately have to fight for the seizure of power. In our work within the social movements we must seek above all to organize a current that gives priority to the development of a class and mass struggle perspective. In Quebec, this means today striving to make Québec solidaire a mass party of the working class.

E9 Québec solidaire must become a party that will combine its electoral campaigns with the support of extra-parliamentary mobilizations in order to convince a growing number of workers of the impasse of capitalism and the need for socialism. This requires fighting for structural reforms which, in addition to improving living conditions, bring about a transfer of power from capital to our class. These are transitional reforms which go beyond the capitalist horizon, and which involve struggles that develop capacities and raise the expectations of working people.

E10 We do not claim to know exactly how the transition from capitalism to socialism will take place, but we wish to contribute to the construction of a party that is able to intervene in the crisis of legitimacy of capitalism and of the State as it becomes more acute. Québec solidaire could even contribute to creating such a crisis by supporting the development of democratic resistance movements controlled by their rank and file — masses of people leading in the organization of strikes, the occupation of workplaces, student strikes, massive demonstrations — and by forming a government that implements structural reforms that attack the power of capital.

E11 Such massive and democratic mobilizations, combined with a government committed to structural reforms, will have to lead to a situation of rupture with capitalism. Since the ruling class never concedes power without resistance, a socialist government supported by popular mobilizations will have to do whatever is necessary to defend democracy and its mandate and to accomplish a program of redistribution, expropriation, and radical democratic reform of state institutions. At the same time, the government will have to support the development of new popular democratic institutions that are sure to emerge from the grassroots in the workplaces and communities.

F. Class-struggle election campaigns

F1 We want to form a mass class-based party that both conducts election campaigns and helps to build the social movements. We want Québec solidaire to become such a party. This implies contributing to the development of struggles and a class unity that is much greater than what exists today.

F2 Just as the party's goal cannot simply be to win elections, its election campaigns cannot be reduced to "communications strategies". The interests of workers are not created by rhetoric. The party discourse must articulate material interests and class conflicts that already exist latently in society. Between the lukewarm opportunist discourse and propagandist slang, we must develop a discourse that is anchored in people's daily problems, explicitly links them to class relations, and helps to build our mobilizations.

F3 For the majority of the population, politics boils down to elections. To ignore the importance of electoral work is therefore to confine oneself to the margins and political insignificance. Our aim, however, is to help broaden the popular conception of politics, to take it beyond elections and parliament.

F4 One of our biggest challenges is to use electoral politics to develop our power while avoiding the trap of cooptation. The deputies and the governments of the left must serve our movement, never the other way around. Socialist politicians should act first as organizers of the movement, and then as legislators. They must use their positions and parliamentary resources to support the organization of workers and demonstrate how capitalist politicians are standing in the way of necessary changes.

G. A bottom-up strategy

G1 The most important task for socialists is to help develop a combative movement of workers, diverse and democratic. Our class-struggle electoral campaigns must be part of a socialism "from below" which involves democratically organized struggles and enables those leading them to develop their capacities and their political consciousness. As we strive to change our political and economic context, we transform ourselves — it is this process of self-transformation and development of our capacities that will help us to organize our political and economic institutions democratically.

G2 Because capitalists depend on their exploitation for profit, the greatest potential power of workers is in the workplace. These places bring together individuals from all social backgrounds and generate common interests that can serve as a basis for powerful movements.

G3 With this in mind, socialists should help organize grassroots workers and build the link between a socialist movement and the militant minority that is already organizing and struggling in the workplace. Together, we can build democratic and combative unions that confront employers, organize unorganized workers, and lead political campaigns that go beyond the workplace. Likewise, we must support democratic and combative tendencies in other social movements.

G4 Above all, it is not a question of "infiltrating" and interfering in trade union and social movements without their knowledge, but on the contrary of contributing to the democratization and autonomy of movements within which we ourselves are rooted. There is a gradation of levels and methods of support. We can provide concrete, tactical and material support for the organization of struggles on the ground. We can produce analyzes that situate struggles in their broader political and socio-economic context. Eventually, and when a real implantation allows it, we can contribute to the strategic debates that orient the struggles in a transparent and democratic way.

G5 Given our limited resources, our attention should shift to strategic economic sectors and social movements — those in which workers have the best chance to organize and exercise maximum power over employers. Where possible, we should work with union leaders and institutions, bearing in mind that union leaders and staff are often resistant to our perspective of union renewal. Knowing this, and when possible, we must prioritize the formation of caucuses of members who aim to democratize and revitalize their union organizations from the grassroots.

H. The struggle for independence

H1 The Canadian state was built through a colonial policy aimed at the assimilation of the Aboriginal, Métis, Inuit, Acadian and Quebec nations. The social and political struggles waged from the 1960s made it possible to largely decouple class exploitation and the national oppression of the Quebecois, which had until then been generally interwoven. Today, workers in Quebec are exploited both by Canadian, American and globalized capital and by Québec Inc., whose leaders have sided with the federalist camp. The Quebec nation is not an ethnic group or a simple subjective identity, but a block of classes linked by a common history and territory, a culture in constant evolution, a diversity of social groups and common institutions that define its trajectory and its possibilities.

H2 However, the rights (political, economic, social, etc.) of the Quebec nation are still being violated. The Canadian Constitution does not recognize the existence of a distinct Quebec nation and the federal state denies it its right to self-determination and dispossesses it of several fundamental political and economic levers. Today, national oppression is expressed in the constitutional and fiscal constraints that the federal state imposes on the Quebec state. These are first of all the inability of the Quebec nation to freely determine its political future (the Clarity Act), the imperialism of the Canadian state (a petro-state, laws serving the interests of mining companies, tax havens) and the division of powers between the federal and provincial governments that prevents the Quebec nation from acting collectively to improve its conditions, to develop a society that is just, ecological, democratic and based on social solidarity.

H3 At the same time, the First Nations continue to suffer a degrading oppression and a denial of their fundamental rights. The colonial oppression suffered by Indigenous peoples is as much the responsibility of the federal state as of the Quebec provincial state, which is a subordinate cog of the Canadian state. The liberation of Quebec and Indigenous peoples therefore implies breaking the Canadian colonial state. Regardless of who its perpetrators are, colonialism must be fought in all its forms: territorial dispossession, denial of human rights, cultural genocide, exploitation of immigrants and people of colour by the bosses, the state and its police, environmental destruction, manufacturing and sale of arms in support of imperialist projects, etc.

H4 The struggle for the independence of Quebec and the liberation of the other oppressed nations must be a key element of our socialist strategy. One of the main flaws of Canadian capitalism lies in the federalism which serves as its political envelope while oppressing the minority nations within it. The struggle for independence must go beyond the provincialist framework and be firmly part of a pan-Canadian strategy. This struggle must break out of the bourgeois nationalist straitjacket — the idea that our interests are closer to the capitalists here than to those of workers in other nations. The task is not to oppose the Quebec nation to the minorities within it, as the identity-based nationalists do so blatantly, but to bring together the working classes, the unemployed, subordinate groups and Indigenous peoples within a plurinational liberation project. An emancipatory independence project must provide a socialist, anti-racist and decolonial content to the national question. and this implies a break with the Parti Québécois, which has turned the aspiration for national independence into its opposite, in particular by supporting free trade and US foreign policy. The nationalist elites have also promoted a conception of national identity that has fuelled racism, Islamophobia and xenophobia.

H5 The independentist left must instead link its struggle to a project for a socialist society while supporting the self-determination of the Indigenous nations and developing solidarity with popular mobilizations across Canada. Thus, the struggles of the Quebec nation for independence and of the Indigenous peoples for their self-determination can and must encourage workers in the Rest of Canada to break with the majority nationalism which is part and parcel of their exploitation. We support any approach aimed, on the one hand, at the immediate decolonization of current Canadian

and Quebec institutions, and on the other hand, the building of new institutions based on the principle of self-determination of peoples as well as the democratization of political and economic life in the territory occupied by Canada. Thus, we want to contribute to the establishment of a common front between the different forces at work to put in place concrete measures such as reparations for Indigenous peoples, popular constituent assemblies, the abolition of tax havens for mining companies, as well as the dismantling of the Canadian military-industrial complex.

J. A necessary internationalism

J1 The struggle for independence and for socialism in Quebec must also necessarily be part of an internationalist policy. The Canadian state is a full-fledged imperialist state and a partner of US imperialism. The struggle within — and in opposition to — the Canadian state must be waged in solidarity with resistance to imperialism and colonialism throughout the world. Likewise, we must confront the Quebec state, which supports the exploitation of labour and natural resources internationally and on its territory (the employment of temporary migrant workers).

J2 We are in solidarity with socialist and democratic struggles, against capitalism and against dictatorships everywhere on the planet. Consequently, we reject the false logic that “the enemy of our enemy is our friend” (sometimes called “camp-ism”) — a political position that can lead to the defense of dictatorships in the name of anti-imperialism.

J3 Although these struggles must be fought in separate national frameworks, workers ultimately form a class exploited by capital on a global scale. We therefore want a socialist movement which accumulates victories throughout the world. This implies building strong relationships with socialist parties and organizations in other countries, and therefore sending and receiving delegations, participating in international strategic debates and ultimately coordinating our respective national strategies.

K. Just transition and ecosocialism

K1 The international scientific community is clear: a rapid and decisive change of course must be carried out in the face of the climate and environmental emergency. We cannot trust the capitalists to do this. A small number of large multinational companies produce the majority of carbon emissions. The solution to the climate emergency cannot be based on individual actions, or even simply on technical and scientific proposals. It is a question of power and control over the economy, which requires powerful collective action.

K2 In other words, the environmental issue is a class issue. First, because it is the poorest everywhere on the planet who suffer the most from the impacts of climate change. Secondly, because avoiding the necessary energy transition serves the interests of capital, while large companies produce the commodities that limit and guide our consumption choices while maximizing their profits. Finally, because it is the workers who are best positioned strategically to impose a transition on the capitalists by exercising the power they have to stop the normal functioning of the economic system.

K3 The environmental struggle must therefore be based on the working class and actively involve the trade union movement. It must be carried out in such a way as to explicitly serve the material interests of this class, not to put the blame on its members.

K4 Carbon taxes and carbon trading go against the interests of workers and are ineffective; in Canada the revenues generated are largely paid as compensation in the form of dividends rather than financing the transition. These policies leave the initiative in the hands of private companies —

which necessarily prioritize maximizing their profits — and total carbon emissions therefore continue to rise. What needs to be taxed is not a molecule (carbon) — it is the rich and the corporations that benefit from this system. The revenues generated must be used to finance a just transition plan that allows us to exit the carbon economy. This plan must substantially and immediately improve the living conditions of the workers. This means, for example, infrastructure projects and the conversion of large undertakings that guarantee green, quality jobs; the development of mass public transit that drastically reduces congestion; and the nationalization and democratization of key economic sectors.

K5 There will be no green capitalism, and socialism will have to be “ecosocialism,” helping to bring about a transformation of our relationship with nature through a democratization of the economy. We will then be able to organize production not to maximize profits, but to meet our needs while preserving the only planet we have.

P.S.

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