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POLITICAL THINKERS PRESENT IN NICOLAE STEINHARDT'S JOURNALISM

Abstract: Nicolae Steinhardt was a refined intellectual who asserted himself in the interwar period through his collaboration with journals such as *Revista Fundațiilor Regale, Revista Burgheză, Victoria, Libertatea* etc. Apart from the topics that prove N. Steinhardt's love of literature and of any aspect related to culture and art, many of his interwar articles reveal a fine analytical sense at the political level. Steinhardt's anchoring in political life and his concern for understanding political concepts and identifying the features of effective governance are revealed by reading, analysing and exposing the political ideas launched by various thinkers.

In the interwar Steinhardtian journalism one finds pertinent radiographs of different political events that changed the course of history, dissections of political ideologies but also critical analyses of the political ideas of important thinkers of different political "colours" and various ethnic origins, such as: Alexis de Tocqueville, Joseph Barthélemy, Lucien Prévost-Paradol, Benjamin Constant, Silvio Trentin, André Suarès, Georges Sorel, Saint-Simon etc. The way of reporting to the works and their theories is intended to be an objective one by pointing out some positive and negative aspects, but in essence they reflect the author's subjectivity and Steinhardt's political conceptions: the distinction between democracy and liberalism, support for constitutional monarchy and people's freedom, hostility to universal suffrage as a form of mass tyranny, opposition to any form of totalitarianism.

Keywords: N. Steinhardt, journalism, political thinkers, ideologies, interwar period

Nicolae Steinhardt was a refined intellectual concerned with literature, art and culture in general, but he was deeply rooted in political reality regardless of the political system in which he lived. This attitude of N. Steinhardt's "Zoon politikon" was more evident in the interwar period in terms of freedom of expression and the possibility of sharing his political views without censorship or self-censorship, as happened in the communist decades. Critical analysis and support or disapproval of some political doctrinaires are prominent issues in articles published by N.

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Analele Universității "Dunărea de Jos" din Galați, Seria 19, Istorie, tom XX, 2021, pp. 193-204.

Steinhardt in the 1930s and 1940s, many of which were included in antume volumes such as *Între viață și cărți* and *Prin alții spre sine* or posthumous works such as *Articole burgheze* and *Varia* •, the last two volumes mentioned being part of the *Steinhardt Integral*. It is also important to note that some of the articles and implicitly the volumes published during the communist years include in veiled forms political ideas sustained in the youth and in the "drawer" works such as *Jurnalul fericirii, Monologul polifonic, Dăruind vei dobândi. Cuvinte de credință*, whole fragments or political opinions formulated in the interwar articles are "spilled", an aspect that reveals the continuity of N. Steinhardt's political thinking.

In interwar Steinhardtian journalism, many articles have exclusively political themes or at least references to doctrinals, ideologies, political concepts or historical events. The article "Liberalism", published on September 1, 1939 in the *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, treats as the title betrays the reporting of several political thinkers to this ideology. It is interesting that this "in love with the Romanian people", assiduous supporter of everything Romanian, from myths to literature, enthusiastically reviewing famous Romanian writers and young beginners, did not show propensity towards Romanian political theorists, so in this article about liberalism he makes no reference to any Romanian liberal doctrinaire, but to French, Italian and British philosophers, historians or politicians.

A first example of this is Alexis de Tocquville, a French political thinker, philosopher and historian who contributed decisively to shaping liberal doctrine by analyzing "live" the social, political and economic system of the United States. Leaving a monarchical France, he spent almost a year in the "New World" analyzing the American republic, the remarkable result of this fruitful stay being the drafting, in the first half of the 19th century work On Democracy in America. N. Steinhardt takes it as a benchmark even if the work was written a century before his political analysis, precisely for his impartiality, an essential aspect pointed out by the Romanian intellectual being the fact that Tocqueville "does not apologize for democracy, but describes it", by revealing the positive aspects, the negative features and even the threats looming over this system. The statement is fully verified because the French doctrinaire appreciates the existence of the two legislative chambers, the two electoral stages, the greater mandate of senators and the observance of political rights: "In America, the people have a high conception of political rights, because he possesses these political rights; he does not attack another's because his own are not violated"2.

¹ N. Steinhardt, "Liberalism," Revista Fundațiilor Regale IV, nr. 9 (Septembre 1937): 596.

² Alexis de Tocqueville, Despre democrație în America, vol.1 (București: Editura

Humanitas, 2005), 270.

Regarding the less beneficial aspects of the democratic system, he notes a paradox, that among those governed there are many capable people but among those who govern the merits are rare: "While the natural instincts of democracy make the people remove people other than in power, a no less strong instinct urges the latter to move away from the political career, where it is more difficult for them to remain completely themselves and to move forward without degrading themselves"³. Steinhardt identifies and praises Tocqueville's distrust of the universal benefits of the principle of equality: "For democracy, equality is the most important thing, even at the cost of slavery. For liberalism, freedom is more valuable, whose condition is the existence of elites"⁴.

Even if he understands that in order to vote knowingly, people must be educated and develop their political knowledge at a higher level in order to avoid manipulation and to understand the gear of the political system, Tocqueville pleads for political rights; "In order to combat the evils that equality produces, there is only one good cure: political freedom"5. In the article "Liberalism" published in the Revista Fundațiilor Regale, Alexis de Tocqueville is listed as a Democrat because he approves of the emancipation of morals, including women's rights, an idea seen by N. Steinhardt as a threat to family stability, but also Liberal because he fears a possible despotism of the masses, under conditions of insufficient guarantees to avoid anarchy and tyranny. According to Steinhardt, Tocqueville's sin was "overoptimism" about the democratic state he perceives centralized and tolerant, erroneously diagnosing the "collapse of liberalism", which did not become a "soft and dusty garment over a masked prom of political regimes". In retrospect, we can see that to some extent they were both right: under the umbrella of democracy, for half a century, far-left totalitarianism controlled much of Europe in violation of liberal principles, and on the other hand, the survival of liberalism, it is true, far removed from the initial precepts, it contributed to the wreck of communist pseudodemocracy.

In the same article, the political doctrine of another liberal democrat is briefly analyzed, this time an Italian political dignitary from the first half of the twentieth century, Francisco Nitti. His "fault", says Steinhardt, lies in the confusion between liberalism and democracy, a lack of a sense of political nuance between these two terms, saying that Nitti's main work, entitled Democracy, should have been called Liberalism⁷. N. Steinhardt's impartial and analytical style is also evident

³ Tocqueville, Despre democrație în America, 229.

⁴ Steinhardt, "Liberalism,": 597.

⁵ Tocqueville, Despre democrație în America, vol.2, 115.

⁶ Steinhardt, "Liberalism,": 598.

⁷ Steinhardt, "Liberalism,": 598.

in this situation, as he is able to point out the value of his political thinking even if he does not agree with it when he supports principles such as universal suffrage, including women's suffrage, trade unionism and the social security system. After analyzing his work, Steinhardt concludes that the value of Nitti's work is given by many aspects: the intuition of avoiding the social utopia of absolute equality, supporting the idea that not the masses but the middle classes are the essential element of democracy, awareness of the danger of mass power can turn into an absolutism of the majority, invoking moral equality as a premise of legislative equality, criticizing exaggerated protectionism, supporting free trade and free movement of people, rejecting theories of eugenics, democratization of morals and the run economy, skepticism about officialdom and the idea of the welfare state, - all this proving that he is a "critical democrat" but "it is not a moment at least, social democrat"8. Advancing with his analysis of other political thinkers, Steinhardt notes that this critical filter related to democracy is not found in Silvio Trentin, who shares with Nitti both anti-fascism and the political vision as a whole, but "with less talent, with an obvious, unrestrained inclination towards democracy", an opinion that once again highlights N. Steinhardt's aversion to the concept of pure democracy or social democracy. How correctly Steinhardt detected this propensity of Trentino to socialism is clear since, a few years after the writing of this article, he had the opportunity to verify his premonitions because during World War II, more precisely on September 8, 1943, the Italian political activist and philosopher initiated a revolutionary, socialist and federalist movement - "Libérer et Fédérer" -, which was the basis of the trade union theory promoted by his son Bruno Trentin, in the second half of the twentieth century¹⁰. Moreover, Silvio Trentin predicted in his reference work, La crise du droit et de l'état, that democracy is a regime in which order and stability are closely related to the constant adaptation of the state constitution to social organization and the failure of this operations will lead to the crisis of private states and the birth of the universal state¹¹.

As for Joseph Barthélemy, a French politician who proclaimed himself a Liberal Democrat in the interwar period, a staunch supporter of political freedom and anti-Nazi, his diagnosis of a far-right orientation that culminated in his tenure as Minister of Justice during the Vichy government was difficult intuitive even for a fine observer like N. Steinhardt. In the early 1930s, when he wrote this study on liberalism, N. Steinhardt also had under his magnifying glass Barthelemy's book,

⁸ Steinhardt, "Liberalism,": 600.

⁹ Steinhardt, "Liberalism,": 600.

¹⁰ Frank Rosengarten, *Silvio Trentin dall'interventismo alla resistenza*, accessed August 8, 2021, <u>https://ronzanieditore.it/acquista/silvio-trentin/</u>.

¹¹ Silvio Trentin, La crise du droit et de l'état (Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1935), 428.

Valeur de la liberté et adaptation de la République, in which he noted the antisocialism and anti-unionism of this analyst who supports free economic initiative, opposes statism seen as an unviable economic system because "if you suppress profit and the possibility of saving, you suppress the reason for work and condemn people to live in misery and stagnation"¹². It is easy to understand the motivation of the compatibility of Stehardhard's thought with that of Barthelemy who considered that trade unionism would destroy the bourgeoisie, that freedom of institutions and respect for the constitutional system is essential for the proper functioning of the state and the guarantee of other freedoms. and referendums are necessary, but that excesses of any kind must be avoided, that democracy is individualistic and Christian, and that its perpetuation requires a moral climate (as Toqueville argued): "Nous avons vécu avec la notion romantique de la liberté, air respirable du monde, oxygène de la société. La vérité c'est que pur naître la liberté dépend de la mentalité, des habitudes, des tendances, de la volonté de chaque peuple. Pour vivre, elle réclame un certain climat moral"¹³. Even if the reconsideration of some of the ideas held in the interwar period was unexpected and paradoxical, as Barthelemy acknowledges in his memoirs, adherence to General Petain's principles is rooted in previously expressed conceptions. The follower of the family and of the increased birth rate as an element of cohesion of the society, of a moral conduct and of the necessity of counseling in this respect of the members of the state group - "Le peuple este souverain. Mais il doit être conseillé, dirigé, governé"¹⁴- they may have determined Barthelemy, in the name of an idealism not understood by some, to accept the rally to the Vichy government and the contribution to the realization of the French Constitution of 1941. Moreover, he did not completely renounce the old belief in political freedoms since [in this constitutional act, on behalf of national unity, he supported the temporary renunciation of freedoms and the return to them when time allows, liberalism being by its nature prone to rally with authoritarianism and being perverted¹⁵.

To the delight of N. Steinhardt, a clear distinction between liberalism and democracy is found in the political work of a British historian and jurist of the late 19th century, Henry James Sumner Maine. He understands that democracy marks a way of governing through which the people, in the sense of "the largest part of the

¹² Steinhardt, "Liberalism,": 602.

¹³ Joseph Barthélemy, *Valeur de la liberté et adaptation de la Republique* (Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sirey, 1936), 77.

¹⁴Barthélemy, Valeur de la liberté, 240.

¹⁵ Gilles Martinez, "Joseph Barthélemy et la crise de la démocratie libérale," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 59, (Anné 1998), 47, accessed August 24, 2021, https://www.persee.fr/doc/xxs 0294-1759 1998 num 59 1 3776.

crowd" participate in government, and that in time "democracy will destroy liberalism and stop progress"¹⁶. But beyond this conception, Sumner Maine identifies the main coordinate of any form of government, whether aristocratic or democratic, namely the sustainability of national existence: "Thees in the very first place, Democracy, like Monarchy, like Aristocracy, like any other government , must preserve the national existence. The first necessity of a State ist that should be durable"¹⁷.

Another thinker and politician whose method of relating to political life, Steinhardt had affinities (not in terms of passionate and tumultuous personal life) was Benjamin Constant. Steinhardt devotes his time to the system of thought and exegesis of one of the most faithful exegetes, Charles du Bos, in an article entitled "On the Constant Benjamin", published in April 1947 in the Revista Fundațiilor Regale. This French writer and politician was contemporaneous with significant events in the history of France, such as the Revolution of 1789, the birth and collapse of the Napoleonic Empire and the Revolution of 1830. "Sovereignty exists only in a limited and relative way. At the point where independence and individual existence begin, the jurisdiction of this sovereignty is stopped"¹⁸, the praise of the British political system and the constitutional monarchy places Constant among the founders of classical liberalism. A critic of Rousseau's system of thought, whose Social Contract he says is "the most terrible auxiliary of all kinds of despotism"¹⁹, Benjamin Constant compares the idea of freedom in antiquity to freedom in the modern age and concludes that the differences are determined by the relationship between public and private. Therefore, taking as a Roman example, he supports the need for the constitutional possibility of dissolving representative assemblies and as an imperative for the stability of the political system he pleads for "the existence of a neutral power, intermediate between the active powers"²⁰. Beyond the political intuition that made him understand that it is necessary to separate the powers in the state whose efficient functioning is ensured by a firm but protective control of an external and neutral force such as the monarchical institution, Benjamin also distinguished himself by empathy and fine analysis of feelings. and the way of thinking of the civic body, launching the following political advice: "Do you want to be sure that a people will be at peace? Tell him everything you can about his

¹⁶ Steinhardt, "Liberalism,": 603.

¹⁷ Henry James Sumner Maine, *Popular government* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1976, 81.

¹⁸ Benjamin Constant, *Cours de politique constitutionelle* (Paris: Librairie de Guillamie, 1872, 9.

¹⁹ Benjamin Constant, *Despre libertate la antici și la moderni* (Iași: Institutul European, 1996), 31.

²⁰ Constant, Despre libertate, 40.

interests. The more he knows, the healthier and calmer he will judge. He is always scared of what is hidden from him and gets angry because of his own fear "²¹.

So Steinhardt, in his article "On the Constant Benjamin", published in the *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, is not wrong in rhetorically asking whether this French politician was "the impeccable psychologist, the master of analysis without reluctance and failure?"²² and when it decrees that the main qualities of its political thinking have been the establishment of the necessity of the limits of the sovereignty of the state and of the rights of the majority in a democratic state.

About the essayist, journalist and liberal doctrinaire Lucien Prévost-Paradol who succeeded in his short existence superimposed on the history of France in the 19th century to launch visionary political ideas, he praises on several occasions, but especially in the article "The Foundation of natural Righ", published in Libertatea in June 1938. Like Toqueville, Prévost-Paradol emphasizes education and morality, as premises of a healthy political system and, as a continuation of Benjamin Constant's political thinking, supports the constitutional monarchy as a more effective form of government than the republic: "La forme républicaine a contre elle deux objections considérables, which may be called philosophical and general, while the other is due to the very practice of things and to a particular difficulty of organization"²³. Undoubtedly, N. Steinhardt's political ideas found in Prévost-Paradol's political thought a ferment and at the same time a similar conceptual matrix, since the guiding principles were trust in the morality-freedom binomial and distrust in the electoral concept based on universal suffrage, equivalent to a supremacy of "quantity" over "quality". Steinhardt says that "Prévost-Paradol's prophecies are fulfilled in all areas"24, most of the predictions having as central pivot the observance or violation of the code of ethics: the rise and decline of peoples is based on moral causes; the intrinsic link between morality in private relations and morality in public and political life; measuring the degree of civilization according to the will of individuals to support as a matter of priority the general interest to the detriment of material interests; distortion of democracy and the possibility of its total collapse through anarchy or even tyranny; the moral basis of natural rights and not legislative or legal, provided that political or administrative institutions can be influenced only

²¹ Constant, Despre libertate, 94.

²² N. Steinhardt, "Cu privire la Benjamin Constant," *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, XIX, nr. 4 (April 1947): 100.

²³ Lucien Prévost-Paradol, *La France Nouvelle*, sixième édition (Paris: Michel Levy Frères, Libraires Editeurs, 1868), 139-40.

²⁴ N. Steinhardt, "Fundamentul drepturilor naturale," *Libertatea*, VI, nr. 12 (June 20, 1938): 198.

by the social spirit, not by the rules of organization, functioning and application that can be changed at any time by law to serve certain interests.

The French doctrinaire sensed the inconveniences of universal suffrage, including the abuse of power, the possibility of the "legal" introduction of tyranny and the exclusion of eminent people from political institutions²⁵, but he hoped that by obtaining this political right the masses would demand nothing more. If the Romanian intellectual praised the prophetic character of Prévost-Paradol's writings, this time, it is our turn to highlight the visionary spirit of N. Steinhardt who feels the roller of social and moral changes that will culminate, as we are already witnessing, with a manipulation and limitless emancipation of the human mind: "Prévost-Paradol could not have guessed that soon the masses would demand more, would use its political rights for non-political purposes, would demand social reforms, then Social reform, then moral revolutions and finally mental catastrophes"26. As we have already mentioned, in Steinhardt's language and thought we often find two recurring terms: honorability and decency, the first inspired by his good friend Emanuel Newman and the second taken from Seilliere's work, both notions being associated with the idea of common sense, good faith, dignity and honor that should animate the human spirit. What is certain is that, based on the views expressed by Prévost-Paradol, N. Steinhardt concludes that neither science nor laws or courts can guarantee fundamental rights, but the degree of conscience and good faith of people: "Another is the basis of fundamental human rights and natural: it is the touching and uplifting, holy and grave image of the good man"²⁷.

Apart from the personalities unanimously accepted as belonging to the category of political thinkers, over time scholars have asserted themselves, who, like Nicolae Steinhardt, were better known in the literary, philosophical or literary criticism sphere, but in the subsidiary, through their works they also transmitted ideas of political thought. In the suite of such intellectuals, read and analyzed by N. Steinhardt are André Suarès, Julien Benda, Chesterton, Berdiaev. An article with a political connotation, published in the Journal of the Royal Foundations, is entitled André Suarès against the barbarians, in which N. Steinhardt analyzes his way of thinking and his position on political events contemporary to his life, from the French Republic of 1871 to the dramatic situation of France in the years of the Second World War.

A common thread that runs through the entire Steinhardtian creation is honorability, so it is easy to understand his empathy and sympathy for this dignified, brave and objective French intellectual who incriminates any kind of barbarism,

²⁵ Prévost-Paradol, *La France Nouvelle*, 63.

²⁶ Steinhardt, "Fundamentul drepturilor naturale," 200.

²⁷ Steinhardt, "Fundamentul drepturilor naturale," 200.

from the ancient, to depraved, degenerate emperors and tyrants, as is the case of Tiberius, to the medieval, irrational and antihuman, to the modern one that gave personalities like Napoleon and Karl Marx, to the political and social aberrations of the twentieth century, manifested in communism, fascism or Nazism. Without being a political thinker, he has the ability to understand the essence of political principles, sees beyond the facade and penetrates the heart of the totalitarian construction, which has its origin in socialism: "La Révolution français, tournée en révolution universelle, c' est l'Empire socialiste. Rome et Berlin ne sont que des Etats socialistes déguisés"28. André Suarès puts tyranny on the wall and associates it with negative traits such as the cult of the tyrant's personality, excesses of any kind, torture, incompetence, favoritism, ridicule and for freedom does not make a cult, does not support it at all costs, being aware that if it is not accompanied by human dignity and is not accompanied by cooperation can degenerate into anarchy. Steinhardt acknowledges his merits: "This intellectual understood better as a politician, this writer was more attentive than the most outspoken of the so-called 'realists' who took us to Munich and the war"²⁹.

Another contemporary French writer and philosopher with Julien Benda was Ernest Seillière, who came to N. Steinhardt's attention through his moderate, settled, moralistic style of being, in other words, through his decency. The analysis of older or newer philosophical systems has led him to conclude that civilization is not in continuous progress, it also has periods of syncope determined by a current, which he calls mysticism and associates it with romanticism or imperialism, a current that amplifies in society fanaticism, superstition and negative instincts. Seillière does not believe in the natural goodness of the people of whom the idealist Rousseau speaks, who "went from error to error in all his systems" ³⁰, but trusts in their educability, being, therefore, a psychological pessimist and a moral optimist. This system underlies Seillière's political attitude, namely antisocialism, discouraging the unlimited power of the masses, who by their nature are attracted to mysticism and who, by the rule of the game of dominoes, can provoke chain actions, characterized by fanaticism and irrationality. Because the main ingredients of his political thinking are common sense and confidence in the ability of people to progress through will and education, N. Steinhardt places this French intellectual in the same political

²⁸ André Suarès, *Vues sur L'Europe* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1939), 125.

²⁹ Steinhardt, Articole Burgheze, 251.

³⁰ Ernest Seillière, *Le Péril mystique dans l'inspiration des Démocraties contemporaines* (Paris: La Renaissance du livre, 1918), 134.

framework, positively received by himself - liberal conservatism: "Seillière's liberalism he is circumspect and moderate. It's conservative"³¹.

The article, which praises Ernest Seillière's attempt to draw humanity's attention to the danger of mysticism, gives Steinhardt an opportunity to remind us that socialism is the most dangerous of the new fanatical beliefs, so it addresses some of the ideas of socialists such as Saint- Simon, Sorel and Edouard Berth. Referring to Saint-Simon and the parable he exemplified, in which he concludes sententiously that between the death of the ruling elite of a state and the death of three thousand (did you also think about the ratio between this number and that of the inhabitants of a state?) of capable people in the economy and culture, the one that would cause chaos would be the second option, Steinhardt explains the falsity of this theory arguing that it would be tragic the death of thousands of workers, engineers and intellectuals but the social and political order would not be affected, while otherwise "a great anarchy would take over the whole nation"³². Looking back on the historical past, the unfolding of events shows that justice is on Steinhardt's side, because there have been tragic events such as natural cataclysms or wars that have shattered more than 3,000 lives among workers and scholars and the existence of the state has not it was endangered, instead, only the extinction of some dynasties, not the death of the entire ruling elite caused instability and power struggles. Regarding Georges Sorel, the doctrinaire of permanent poverty, Steinhardt notices the paradox between this theory and his admiration for enterprising Americans, incriminating the immorality of the theory of this socialist doctrinaire, by supporting the premeditated decline in people's living standards. About Sorel's disciple, Édouard Berth, who presents socialism "as a new huge religious revolution"³³, he expresses his concern because the disappearance of meritocracy and moral values only facilitates the absolute power of the masses blinded by mysticism.

This review of interwar articles highlights, on the one hand, Steinhardt's attempt to be objective, to present the strengths and less strengths of some political thinkers, but on the other hand, with a clear mind in certain political system considered optimal, the interwar intellectual only reveals himself and his political conceptions through the operated doctrinal analyzes. One of N. Steinhardt's most knowledgeable biographers issues the following doctrinal diagnosis of this intellectual: "he is liberal, but skeptical of democracy. He is a liberal-

³¹ N. Steinhardt, "Ernest Seillière: filozofia omului cumsecade; religia socială," *Libertatea*, V, nr.24, (Decembre, 1937): 542.

³² Steinhardt, "Ernest Seillière: filozofia omului cumsecade; religia socială," 551.

³³ Steinhardt, "Ernest Seillière: filozofia omului cumsecade; religia socială," 544.

conservative"³⁴. Being well known for the appreciation, almost obsessive for balance and "right calculation", one can intuit that when presenting the conclusion of Maurice Martin Du Gard, a disciple of the Enlightenment philosopher Montesquieu, N. Steinhardt reveals, in reality, his own system of political thought: "Now we understand: you can be a partisan of the middle normal, a servant of freedom and order but harshly, completely, with delight, conviction and violence. We know you can be liberal, extremely. You can be a center-right extremist"³⁵. Therefore, based on this principle of "extreme center" are shown the other political conceptions of Steinhardt: support for constitutional monarchy, human freedom and hostility to any form of tyranny, implicitly to the universal vote that could lead to a despotism of masses.

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³⁴ George Ardeleanu, N. Steinhardt şi paradoxurile libertății (Bucureşti: Editura Humanitas, 2009), 94.

³⁵ N. Steinhardt, Articole Burgheze, 535.

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