

THE DAY IS COMING!

British Aerial Propaganda to Germany, 1940–44

By Lee Richards



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The German occupation of France in May–June 1940 brought about a dramatic rethink of Britain's war strategy. Towards the end of May the Chiefs of Staff considered what their future strategy would be if France ceased fighting. Several ideas to achieve the defeat of Germany were discussed: a combination of economic pressure, air attack on economic objectives in Germany and on German morale, and the creation of widespread revolt in the conquered territories. They also urgently ordered plans to be put into effect to create a special organisation to conduct subversive action in occupied countries.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of July a new secret organisation was constructed from three existing ones to form the Special Operations Executive (SOE). It was given the brief to coordinate subversion and propaganda in enemy and enemy occupied countries. The subversive side was handled by Section D and MI(R) which together formed SO2. Section D was originally set-up in March 1938 by the head of the Secret Intelligence Service to be responsible for "unacknowledgeable activities" including sabotage, political subversion, and covert propaganda. A Royal Engineers officer, Major Lawrence Grand, was appointed head of the department; a man known to have the gift of leadership and an unusually pretty wit.<sup>2</sup> MI(R) run by Major John Holland previously had worked closely with Section D and had a similar brief, the main difference being that MI(R)'s chores would be conducted by uniformed men.<sup>3</sup> Propaganda continued to be produced by Electra House (EH), which now became SO1 of SOE. Responsibility for BBC broadcasts temporary belonged to the Ministry of Information.

One of the first changes within SO1 was the removal of Sir Campbell Stuart as head of propaganda. During July he had been in Canada negotiating for a site to construct a radio transmitter for the BBC. As the *Wehrmacht* swept across Europe it became paramount for the BBC to have alternative broadcasting stations if they lost the use of theirs in Britain. When Stuart returned to London his post was terminated. With the change of Government on 10 May several members of the new leadership were suspicious of Sir Campbell. A rumour was circulating that Stuart was claiming he had travelled to Canada on behalf of the Government in order to arrange for its evacuation there if necessary. Hugh Dalton, the Minister of Economic Warfare and now responsible for SOE, wrote to Churchill,

I share the view of some of my colleagues that he [Sir Campbell Stuart] is not without good qualities. On the other hand, I have become convinced that he is so widely disliked, both in the Service Departments and in some political circles, that his continued presence here as head of Electra House would be a constant source of friction and disharmony. This I am most anxious to avoid at the outset of my new coordination work.

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Dalton concurred with Duff Cooper, the Minister of Information, that Stuart's post should be suppressed; Churchill replied, "Proceed as you propose."<sup>4</sup>

Rex Leeper became the new Director of SO1 with Mr. C. F. A. Warner as his deputy and liaison with SO2. Six regional departments were formed for propaganda to Germany, Italy, France, Scandinavia, the Balkans, and the Low Countries. Richard Crossman became head of the German Section.<sup>5</sup>

A joint memorandum by Duff Cooper and Hugh Dalton was submitted to the War Cabinet laying out Britain's propaganda policy. Many of the conclusions in this paper reiterated much of what Stuart had already put to the Government. Britain's future propaganda output was addressed.

Although essentially we are fighting for our very existence, this factor alone is not fully adequate to the psychological needs of our own people and means nothing to our enemies. A more positive conception is required. From the point of view of our propaganda, there is a real need for a formulation of post-war aims in broad terms which will sustain the spiritual motive force of our own people, appeal to our supporters abroad (especially America) and counter the German conception of a new order.<sup>6</sup>

Also, to "hammer home" the fact that German aggression caused the war, that Britain would offer a fair peace but would in the mean time have a growing ability "to meet terror with terror and to mete out retribution" were other subjects to be stressed through psychological warfare.

The theme of meeting "terror with terror" was often emphasised in the leaflet output. One chilling SO1 leaflet proclaimed *The Day is Coming!* with an illustration of a swastika hanging from a gallows. A map on the reverse showed the potential range of RAF and American bombers, how far they would be able to penetrate into Germany in 1941, 1942, and by 1943 the Allied Air Forces flying over 1,425 km from Britain reaching Vienna – there was no escaping the bombers. Another leaflet showed graves with Rotterdam, Warsaw, Louvain, and Amiens inscribed on them with the message "Total War against the weaker didn't hurt you". The other side simply read "WE HIT BACK".

As well as terror propaganda truthful, but sometimes incomplete, news was used in the psychological campaign. In June 1941 Germany began receiving a regular newspaper produced by the British. This paper, *Luftpost* (Air Post), was disseminated up until September 1944 in various forms. The leaflet's format under SO1's editorship consisted of four black and white pages, sized 21 cm x 13 cm, and incorporated many half-tone photographs. The typical contents of *Luftpost* would have the outside pages dedicated to articles about the Allies and the insides addressing Nazi issues. Main themes would include such items as the battle of the Atlantic, the RAF offensive, and Britain's and America's production potential – basically Great Britain will win, with American aid. Other articles included "Goebbels Lies", "What they do not tell you", as well as stressing Germany's guilt for the war and for civilian bombing. Lists of prisoners

of war were given with a reminder that the BBC regularly broadcast the names of all POWs. It also contained foreign language items, in Polish for instance, for foreign workers and prisoners.<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of March 1941 SO1 drafted a *Fundamental Plan of Propaganda to Germany*. This plan laid down Britain's long-term and short-term strategic objectives with which psychological warfare had to adhere. The long-term objective was simply the complete destruction of the German war machine, the National Socialists and the type of state it had founded. The Plan went on to say,

We should bear in mind that it is not in our interest that the USSR should inherit the territory of the Third Reich. We should seek to prevent this in cooperation with the Poles and Czechs.

Short-term objectives with which propaganda should aid were the educating in and inciting of all forms of sabotage or guerrilla warfare and the economic dislocation of Germany. The way in which propaganda would assist these objectives was addressed but again basically rehashed themes drawn-up by Electra House and even Crewe House in 1918. In fact comparisons were made through propaganda between the present war and the 1914–18 war. Essentially Britain will eventually win with great loss to Germany.<sup>8</sup>

With the German invasion of Russia in June 1941 and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December, resulting in the direct involvement of the United States in the war, Britain had two new powerful fighting allies. Britain's distrust of the Soviet Union would continue and was concerned of the threat of Bolshevism replacing the Nazis in Europe. In July, reasons for intensifying propaganda to Germany were considered,

...A secondary reason for a propaganda offensive against Germany is the stubborn resistance of the Russian armies and the flood of propaganda to Germany put out by the Russian Government. If the Russians are permitted to monopolise the attention of German listeners and to induce a purely pro-Russian attitude in the minds of the potential German opposition, the results will in the long run be detrimental to British interests. Conversely, since we desire to do all in our power to assist the Russians in their resistance, we should consider whether it is possible to increase our pressure on Germany by using propaganda as an auxiliary to the fighting services.<sup>9</sup>

Russia's future intentions in Europe may not of been fully trusted but the fact that Germany was fighting on another front meant that this could be exploited in British psychological warfare, as well as exploiting through propaganda the massive resources of America in arms production and men.

Since the formation of SO1 there had been continual bickering between Duff Cooper and Hugh Dalton over the control of psychological warfare. The problem began when the Ministry of Information was temporarily given control of the BBC's "white" broadcasts to enemy and enemy-occupied countries while Dalton was establishing SOE. But when Dalton wanted control of the BBC passed to the Ministry of Economic Warfare Cooper refused. For nearly a year the two Ministers squabbled over the issue. Cooper maintained that the BBC's European Service was accountable to Parliament so therefore could not be part of a secret department whose actions were above public debate. Dalton quoted SOE's charter, that it was to conduct subversion and propaganda, as his defence and that all psychological warfare should be controlled by one department. In mid-1941 Churchill intervened to finally sort out the coordination of foreign propaganda.

As a result, by August a new department was established named the Political Warfare Executive (PWE).<sup>10</sup> The organisation was controlled by a Ministerial Committee, consisting of the Foreign Secretary, Sir Anthony Eden, and the Ministers of Information and Economic Warfare. The day-to-day running of the department was initially entrusted to an Executive Committee of three officials. The Scotsman, Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, was Chairman and representative of the Foreign Office. He worked with Rex Leeper, who reported to the MEW and Brigadier Dallas Brooks, for the MOI. Later, when Dalton left MEW the Executive Committee was disbanded and Lockhart became Director-General of PWE, or the "Peeweeps" as – internally – it was often known as. Churchill officially announced its existence to the House of Commons on 11 September 1941.<sup>11</sup>

Almost as soon as PWE came into being leaflet output to Germany quite dramatically changed visually. Up until then all leaflets had been printed by standard black and white lithographic methods on course paper and mainly sized 21 cm x 13 cm. But from the beginning of 1942 the photogravure printing process was used. This allowed the use of multi-colouring on the leaflet and better reproduction of photographs. A new, specially developed, high quality, thin paper was used for printing. The size and style of leaflets began to vary as well. One that was disseminated throughout December 1941 was shaped and coloured to resemble a leaf. Reproduced on one side was the front-page of the *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten* with the headline, "1941 Will be the Year of Final Victory", with a caption added around this, "The leaves fall. The promised victory hasn't arrived." The reverse showed a German newspaper headline, "In the Year of Final Victory – 1941." Another caption added, "In Russia fallen leaves cover fallen soldiers – and snow covers the leaves which cover the fallen soldiers." It was probably inspired by a German leaflet scattered on French troops, in November 1939, with the message, "The leaves are falling. We [French Troops] are falling like them. The leaves die because God wills it. But us, we die because the English will it."<sup>12</sup>

**RAF**  
**V**

Ouvriers français en Allemagne  
**RAF**  
**V**  
Ceci est le symbole de votre liberation. Employez-le!

Lavoratori italiani in Germania  
**RAF**  
**V**  
Questo è il simbolo della vostra liberazione. Usatelo!

Niederlandsche Arbeiders in Deutschland  
**RAF**  
**V**  
Dit is het teeken van Uw bevrijding. Gebruikt het!

Robotnicy Polscy w Niemczech!  
**RAF**  
**V**  
Oto symbol waszego wyzwolenia. Pamiętajcie o tem!

Überall im besetzten Westen, in Frankreich, Holland und Belgien findet man diese Buchstaben auf Wänden, Türen und Bürgersteigen von unbekannten Händen mit Kreide hunderttausendfach angeschrieben.  
Jedes Kind in diesen drei Ländern weiß, was die Buchstaben bedeuten.  
**R.A.F.** heisst Royal Air Force (Britische Luftwaffe). Sie ist der Freund der unterdrückten und ausgebeuteten Völker und der Bote der Hoffnung und der Ermutigung. Sie ist es aber auch, die die deutschen Kasernen, Flugplätze, Schiffe, Werften, Munitions- und Öllager mitten in den besetzten Ländern in Trümmer legt.  
**V** heisst dreierlei: Für die Franzosen und Wallonen bedeutet es VICTOIRE (Sieg) und VENGEANCE (Vergeltung), für die Holländer und Flamen bedeutet es VRIJHEID (Freiheit). Aber für alle diese Völker hat es denselben Sinn: die entgültige Erledigung Hitlers und des Dritten Reichs.  
Diese Völker wissen gut, dass ihre Freunde, die R.A.F., dank der vereinigten Kräfte Englands und Amerikas, den Tag des Sieges, der Vergeltung und der Befreiung immer näher bringen!

**Es kommt der Tag!**

**Totaler Krieg gegen Schwächere tat Euch nicht weh**

**WIR SCHLAGEN ZURÜCK**

Above left: Leaflet EH.508, *The Day is Coming!*

Above right: Leaflet EH.408, *Total War against the weaker didn't hurt you.*

**Die Blätter fallen**  
Mündiger Mensch  
1941 wird das Jahr der Endziege werden  
Der versprochene Endsieg bleibt aus

**In Russland decken gefallene Blätter gefallene Soldaten**  
In das Jahr des Endzuges 1941  
Und Schnee deckt die Blätter, die gefallene Soldaten decken

Norddeutsche Ausgabe  
303. Ausgabe - 54. Jahrgang - Erschienen am 20. Oktober 1941  
Berlin, Freitag, 20. Oktober 1941

**VÖLKISCHER BEOBSACHTER**

Kampfblatt der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung  
Gründungsheft

**Die große Stunde hat geschlagen: Der Feldzug im Osten entschieden!**

**Heeresgruppen Timoschenko und Woroschilow eingeschlossen — Heeresgruppe Budjenny in Auflösung**

**Neuer Kessel bei Brjansk Das militärische Ende des Bolschewismus**

Die letzten voll kampffähigen Divisienen der Sowjets gesiegt

Das ist die heutige Lage:  
1. Die deutsche Heeresgruppe Wjesskauw ist im Norden in die Kesselung eingeschlossen und erwartet ihre Befreiung.  
2. Die deutsche Heeresgruppe Kaljuzin ist im Norden eingeschlossen und erwartet ihre Befreiung.  
3. Die deutsche Heeresgruppe Timoschenko und Woroschilow sind in die Kesselung eingeschlossen und erwartet ihre Befreiung.  
4. Die deutsche Heeresgruppe Budjenny ist in Auflösung.

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Above left: Leaflet EH.527, *1941 Will be the Year of Final Victory.*

Above right: Leaflet G.3, *Völkischer Beobachter*, "The Great Hour has Struck: The Campaign in the East has Ended!"



Above: Leaflet G.12, "I feel so fresh, the spring is coming".

Hier sind Bilder aus dem Leben eines U-Bootmanns; sein Leben ist kurz und reich an Abenteuern

<p><b>1. FREIWILLIGE FÜR DIE U-BOOTWAFFE GESUCHT</b> Der 18-jährige Tischlergeselle Günther Hartmuth liest im „Angriff“, dass die Flotte Freiwillige für U-Boote braucht. Die Löhnung ist gut: 140 RM im Monat, einschließlich Tausch- und Frontzulage.</p>	<p><b>2. „DER FÜHRER BRAUCHT MICH“</b> Günther: „Und siehst du, Mutter, der Führer braucht mich. Alle Leute sagen, dass die Schlacht im Atlantik ungeheuer wichtig ist. Und ich bringe dann das U-Bootsabzeichen und das Eisernes Kreuz.“</p>	<p><b>3. AUSBILDUNGSZEIT IN DER SCHIFFSSTAMMABTEILUNG</b> Rekrutungskorps! Auf die Bläuse, ihr Affen! Höhenluft ist gesund. Ich werde euch schon bei den Marineweibchen kriegen, ihr traurigen Sackel!“</p>	<p><b>4. NACH DER ERSTEN ÜBUNGSFAHRT IN DER OSTSEE</b> Günther: „Zuerst war ich ein bisschen aufgeregt, aber alles ging tadellos. Ein feines Leben!“ Das Mädchen: „Wie hübsch du aussiehst in deiner neuen Uniform!“</p>	<p><b>5. DIE ERSTE NACHT IN KIEL—IN EINEM LUFTSCHUTZKELLER</b> Johannes: „Sie greifen mal wieder die Germania vor!“ Letzte Woche haben sie da zwei halbfertige U-Boote kaputtgeschmissen. Uns Arbeitern ist das egal. Wir sind nicht scharf darauf, schwimmende Särge für die deutsche Jugend zu bauen.“</p>
<p><b>6. GÜNTHER HARTMUTH MELDET SICH ZUR STELLE IN LORIENT</b> Kapitänleutnant: „Wie lange ausgebildet, Hartmuth?“ Günther: „10 Wochen, Herr Kaleant.“</p>	<p><b>7. IM OZEAN</b> Massenkommand: „Schon wieder einer, der nicht weeten will! Weiss der Teufel, warum sie uns jetzt solche lächerliche Pimpfe schicken.“ Und mit so was sollen wir angreifen!“</p>	<p><b>8. EIN AMERIKANER GEKNACKT</b> Günther (zu einem Kameraden): „Arme Teufel! Schade, dass wir sie nicht aufnehmen können. Bis zur amerikanischen Küste sind es 700 Meilen.“</p>	<p><b>9. VON EINEM AMERIKANISCHEN FERNAUFLÄRER ENTTDECKT</b> Fernzweckbesucher: „Da ist der Jerry! Funkpruch an die Atlantikpatrouille!“</p>	<p><b>10. WASSERBOMBEN!</b> Oberleutnant (für): „E-Maschinen ausgefallen! Boot fällt.“ Kommandant: „Tauschretter anlegen! Anblasen!“</p>
<p><b>11. GERAMMT!</b> Durch die Wasserbomben der Atlantikpatrouille schwer beschädigt, muss das U-Boot aufzuheben und wird von einem britischen Zerstörer gerammt. Der Druckkörper wird aufgerissen.</p>	<p><b>12. EINIGE WERDEN GERETTET . . .</b> Der Kommandant und ein paar Leute, die vom Turm über Bord gesprungen waren, werden von einem englischen Rettungsboot aufgenommen.</p>	<p><b>13. . . ABER ANDERE NICHT</b> Günther und die anderen Neulinge sind in dem sinkenden U-Boot eingeschlossen. Das Wasser dringt durch Leck und Turm ein.</p>	<p><b>14. VIER MONATE DANACH—EIN TELEGRAMM</b> „Günther Hartmuth ist den Heldenod für Führer und Vaterland gestorben. B d L.“ Die deutsche Marineleitung hat die Nachricht vier Monate zurückgehalten.</p>	<p><b>15. DER FÜHRER SPRICHT</b> Am 30. Januar 1942 prahlt Adolf Hitler vor dem Reichstag, er werde immer mehr U-Boote bauen, immer mehr schwimmende Särge für deutsche Jungen wie Günther Hartmuth.</p>

Above: Leaflet G.9X, The Life of a U-boat Man.



The reproduction of original German newspapers in propaganda output was a tool often used by PWE and also reiterating Hitler's premature announcement that Russia would be defeated by the end of 1941. Many leaflets used this theme. In fact one example was just an exact facsimile of four pages of the Nazi paper *Völkischer Beobachter* for 10 October 1941, with the headline, "The Great Hour has Struck: The Campaign in the East has Ended!" Literally millions of copies of this were dropped by aircraft and balloon all over Germany throughout 1942.

Photomontage was a technique commonly used by PWE. For instance, one leaflet, again knocking the *Wehrmacht's* efforts in Russia, had Hitler rubbing his hands superimposed in a montage of hundreds of dead soldiers laying in the snow with a quote, "I feel so fresh, the spring is coming, (Adolf Hitler, 24 February 1941)."

The U-boat war was another target for psychological warfare. Leaflets intended to encourage desertion and malingering of U-boat crews when ashore were distributed over harbour towns in France and Germany. A comic-strip leaflet was produced portraying a typical day-in-the-life of a U-boat crewmember at sea; being bullied by naval officers, being seasick, being bombed by British aircraft and finally being sunk by a battleship... One hell of a day! The reverse of it asked for volunteers for the U-boat Service. Why? – "2,000 U-boat men are POWs in Britain, ...the rate of German U-boat losses is continually mounting, ...the average life of a German U-boat sailor on active service is 62 days", etc., etc.

The effects of the RAF bomber raids were constantly emphasised. The German people were incited to throw out the Nazi regime. After the 1,000 bomber raid on the night of 30 May 1942 on Cologne and the resulting fire-storm, leaflets were dropped informing the rest of Germany of the magnitude of the raid and to expect more of the same and worse. Churchill was quoted in one leaflet, "From now on we shall bomb Germany on an ever increasing scale, month by month, year by year, until the Nazi regime has either been exterminated by us or – better still – torn to pieces by the German people themselves." On the same leaflet England offered Germany, "Justice for all, Punishment of the criminals, economic equality and security." But demanded, "The German people must act themselves in order to free themselves from Hitler's gangster rule."

Despite the publicity PWE gave to the RAF missions the commander of Bomber Command, Air Marshall Arthur Harris, had no interest in aerial propaganda. In fact, after the war, he commented that leaflet propaganda only achieved to supply Europe's requirements of toilet paper. He went on to say, "I have consistently regarded such methods of warfare as wholly ridiculous and a complete waste of time."<sup>13</sup>

Relations between “Bomber” Harris and PWE during the war were not always genial. In August 1942 there was an almighty flap when a speech written by the Air Ministry, in the name of Harris, for a PWE leaflet was mistakenly broadcast by the BBC German Service. Greater care had to be taken with the contents of a radio broadcast than of a leaflet. Leaflets were classified as secret documents and therefore could not be published by the British Press but radio broadcasts could be. The made-up speech accredited to Harris broadcast on 28 July 1942 caused much public controversy when it was widely published by the British and foreign press. Harris took some flak for the speech from Lord Addison in the House of Lords. Addison criticised him for broadcasting on war aims and strategic policy.

PWE received the blame for the affair, leading to an internal inquiry by Lockhart. He concluded that a combination of errors in procedure by various people in PWE, the BBC, and the Air Ministry led to the muddle. This was partly caused by the fact that Harris had recorded a talk about transport for broadcast by the BBC a fortnight before the drafting of the offending speech, leading to confusion over the two texts. Richard Crossman, the head of the PWE German Section, took the brunt of the blame as it was he who asked the BBC to transmit the speech. Crossman maintained he had permission from the Air Ministry Liaison Officer to use the text for a broadcast but the Liaison Officer insisted he thought the text would only be used for the leaflet. Fortunately Lockhart’s tact saved both Crossman and PWE receiving any serious punishment for supposedly causing the incident. Crossman wrote to Lockhart thanking him for his support,

No one has the right to expect his boss to waste a week defending him from execution. But you did; and the least I can do in return is to take your advice, subsume zeal under discretion and prove to you that I was worth the wasted week.

Despite the fuss caused by the alleged Harris speech, both the broadcast and leaflet were good pieces of propaganda. PWE believed that they had been effective not only in Germany but also the speech had greatly impressed Britain’s allies in their resolve to fight and meet force with force.<sup>14</sup>

Leaflet propaganda continued in much the same vein through 1943 but now was being strengthened by the turn in German fortunes. Germany’s great losses in Russia were continually hammered home, as was the increase of bombing, now with USAAF participation. Their defeat in Tunisia, in May 1943 and the armistice with Italy were used to illustrate that Germany’s downfall was nigh.

Now that there were American bombers based in Britain, the US Eighth Air Force as well as participating in bombing, also undertook leaflet drops. The first leaflets produced by the American Office of War Information (OWI) were disseminated over Germany too. From November 1943 until September 1944 OWI produced a German language newspaper called *Sternenbanner* (Star Spangled Banner) and other leaflets proving America’s military potential.

By the end of 1943 plans were underway for D-day. The role of Political Warfare Executive changed to advisor on propaganda policy. As soon as Overlord, the invasion of NW Europe, began on 6 June 1944 the main producer of aerial propaganda was the Psychological Warfare Division (PWD), under the military command of SHAEF. Throughout 1944, PWE only produced thirty-one different leaflets for Germany and only four in 1945, compared to over one hundred in 1943. Many of PWE's staff joined PWD and PWE concentrated mainly on the BBC's European Service and the production of "Black" propaganda.

## SOURCES

This essay is based mainly on the surviving British Government records held at the Public Record Office (PRO), Kew, Surrey. The following list of sources gives the PRO file reference (e.g. FO 898/1) and the document title. Secondary sources are also listed.

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2. See *SOE in France*, by M. R. D. Foot, HMSO, 1966, and *Baker Street Irregular*, by Bickham Sweet-Escott, 1965.
3. See *Baker Street Irregular*.
4. PREM 3/365/6. Prime Minister's archive.
5. FO 898/9. *SO1 Establishment*, 18 February 1941.
6. CAB 66/13. War Cabinet Memorandum, WP(40) 444, *Propaganda Policy*. 5 November 1940.
7. FO 898/451. *Plan for the Luftpost*, 12 May 1941.
8. FO 898/4. *Fundamental Plan of Propaganda to Germany*, 6 March 1941.
9. FO 898/9. *A Plan for Exploiting the RAF Offensive in Propaganda to Germany*, 28 July 1941.
10. PWE used the cover-name Political Intelligence Department (PID) when communicating with the non-secret world. PID did actually exist as a news department for the Foreign Office.
11. FO 898/9, FO 898/12, PWE organisation files and FO 954/23, Lord Avon papers - *Propaganda*.
12. *Falling Leaf*, no. 128. Magazine of the PsyWar Society.
13. *Bomber Offensive*, by Sir Arthur Harris, 1947.
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