

Resistance

A publication of I.S.A.U.S., member of Confederation of Iranian Students (National Union)

VOLUME FIVE

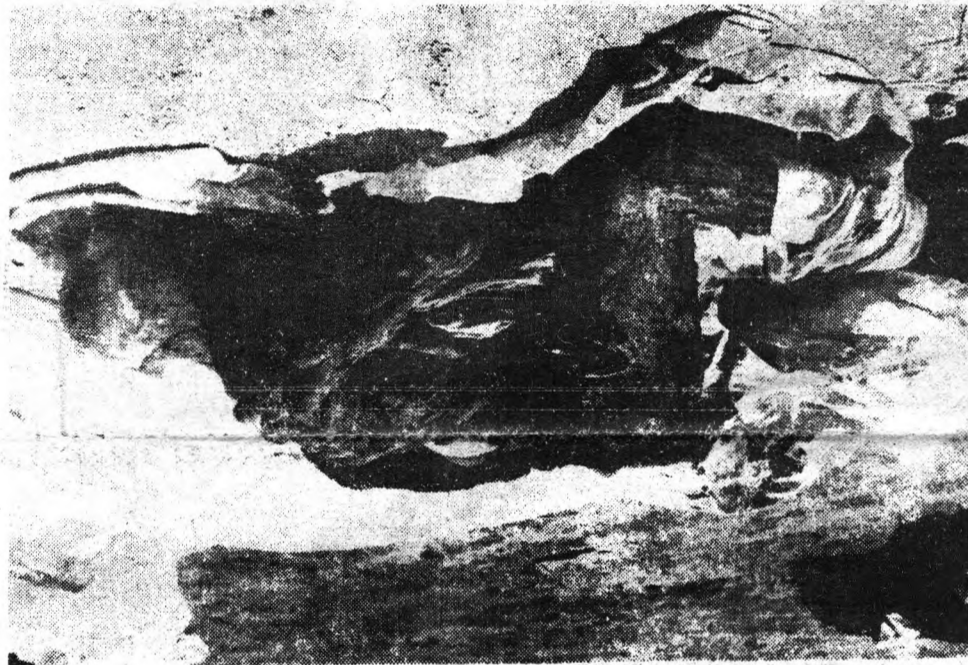
SEPTEMBER 1978

NUMBER SIX

Bloody Saturday Abadan—August 19, 1978



"Which is my beloved one", ask the grief-stricken relatives.



This is a result of Shah's "liberalization program" translated into action.

The Iranian Students Association is calling on all international humanitarian and progressive organizations to help form independent delegations to travel to Abadan to investigate the fire. We call on the people of the world to join us in exposing this vicious crime and send us money to help the victims and families of martyrs of the Abadan fire.

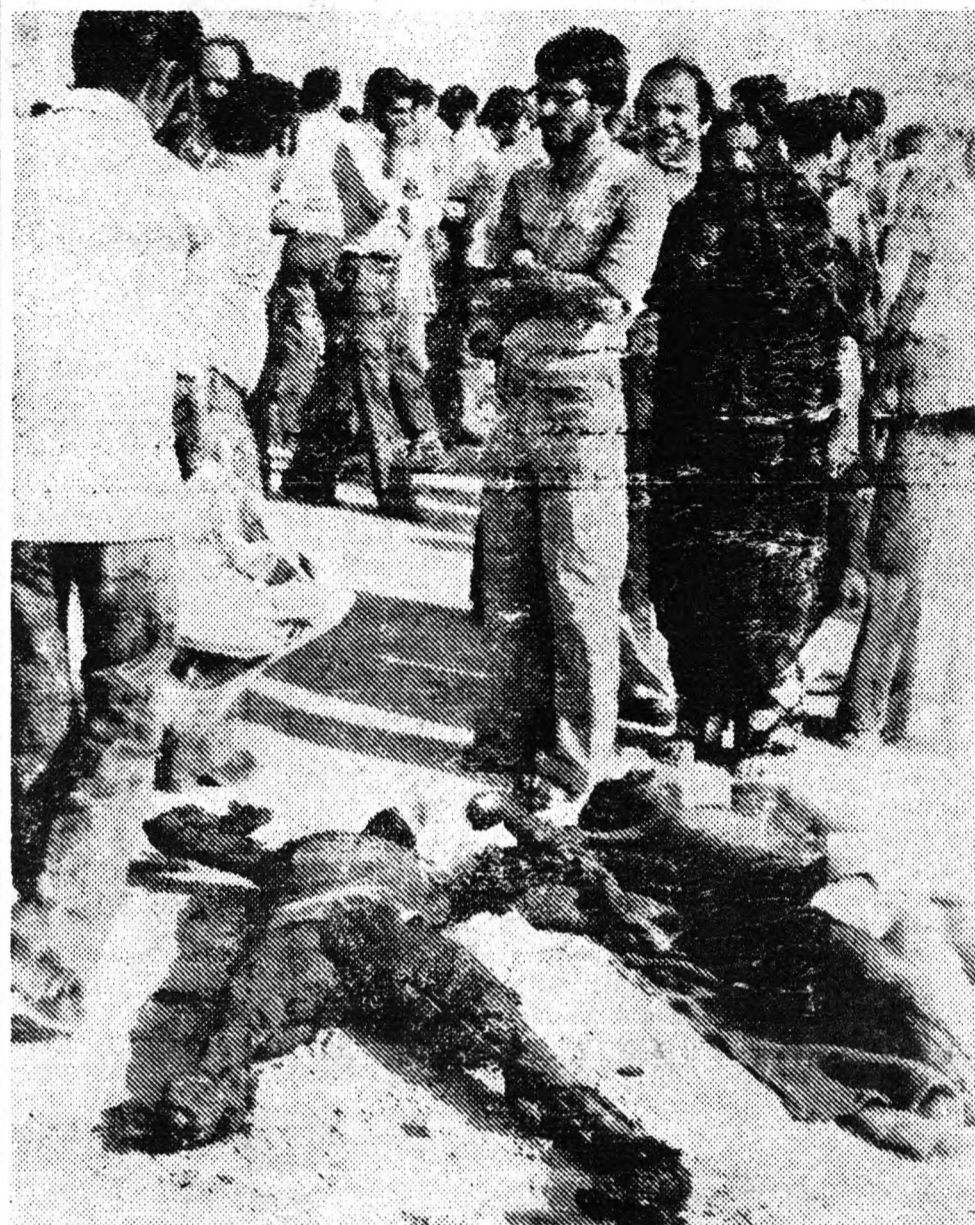
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Long Live the Friendship Between Iranian and American People

- As 750 men, women and children are burning alive, troops surround the theater, attack crowds trying to rescue the victims, and shoot people trying to jump from the roof.
- As some inside broke through chained doors, troops pushed them back inside and re-locked the door; a few who escaped were clubbed by police.
- In what is called the worst fire of the century, Shah's agents—upon direct order of the dictator—set fire to the Rex Cinema in Abadan.

Shah's Inferno



This is not Hitler's Germany, this is Abadan, Iran—the result of Shah's attempt to crush our movement.

What follows is the most complete account we can provide at this time of what took place inside and outside the Rex Cinema on the night of August 19, 1978 in Abadan.

Our report is drawn from the observations of people in Abadan—people who were at the Rex Cinema, people who gathered as the full horror of the death trap unfolded, people whose sons and daughters, sisters and brothers were burned alive, people who led the front ranks of demonstrations less than 24 hours later.

We apologize for one aspect of our report: the weakness of language. The full horror of the events themselves is difficult to convey in any language, but we are confident that as the truth becomes known more and more widely outside Iran it will arouse thundering outrage from all humanitarian forces in the world. Already, within hours of the blaze, the knowledge of where to lay responsibility for this crime was put to work throughout Iran.

Today, at this hour, Iran is blazing with powerful and fearless demonstrations against the Shah, the entire regime, the SAVAKS, the force of arms and military might that backs up reactionary rule and tyranny against our people. Following this factual report will be descriptions of some of the events that have swept through

Iran, including the unending demonstrations in the city of Abadan itself.

* * *

First, a few words about Abadan: The biggest oil refinery in the world is in Abadan. That's what it is known for. Also, it's so hot and oppressively humid in the summer that construction and oil workers are on their jobs by 5 a.m. and cannot work later than 10 a.m.; they resume work around 3 p.m. and continue until 8 o'clock. Furnace blasts of 130 degree heat beat down on the city for hours every day during the summer and evening are often 90 or 100 degrees. Because of the vast stretches of oil refineries and petrochemical plants, the most advanced fire-fighting equipment exists in Abadan and it is regarded as the most sophisticated in the whole Middle East.

Oil workers in Abadan are militant strikers. Throughout 50 years, the duration of Pahlavi rule in Iran, Abadan has been a center of anti-regime and anti-imperialist demonstrations often rallying tens of thousands and even several hundred thousand from the entire region. Their discipline and political consciousness has marked Abadan as one of the most progressive and actively anti-Shah areas of Iran.

The Rex Cinema, located in one of the working class neighborhoods, was a center of anti-Shah activity. The building itself housed a bookstore and coffee shop where rare copies of progressive literature could be secretly obtained and eagerly distributed and discussed. It was a favorite meeting place for anti-Shah people, especially workers and students of Abadan.

On the evening of Saturday, August 19th, there were to be two showings of a movie called "Reindeer." It is a generally progressive film which apparently conveys a simple theme, symbolically depicting the injustice of tyranny and oppression and the heroism of struggle against it.

A progressive film. All tickets had been sold out. The theater holds 830.

The second showing began around 9 p.m. The audience was mostly working class, many entire families, old and young people, men, women and children, a number of students. 830 people packed the theater. The lights went out. The movie began.

* * *

Outside the Rex Cinema, a few dozen people who were passing by noticed smoke seeping out from the roof. It was between 9:30 and 9:45 as people stared curiously at the building. In silence, they saw heavier and heavier smoke. Within minutes, people were heard commenting that "it must be empty."

Many movie theaters have been targeted during 10 months of demonstrations. It is thus not unusual that there might be a fire. But people automatically assumed that any theater fire meant that NO ONE would be inside. There never had been a single injury; all theaters had been empty before being hit by demonstrators. And suddenly people were asking, "Why the Rex?" The pornographic theater, in another section of the city but not far from the Rex, would have been the target. Not the Rex.

Within minutes, people realized that maybe the Rex was NOT empty. A group of 30 had swelled to 500 or 600 within minutes as the smoke also had swelled around the building. It was only seconds before this crowd moved towards the doors.

Suddenly, seeming to come from nowhere, police vans and army trucks filled the entire area. Soldiers and police poured out of the vans and surged in front of the crowd, swiftly blocking the entire front of the building. People were now rushing forward.

There were people inside! By this time, everyone knew it.

Police plunged into the crowd and shoved people backwards. Suddenly this wall of troops and police barricading the door were attacking. Clubs went up in the air, cracking down on hands, heads, backs and arms as people shoved to reach the doorways.

Flames were all around the building. In a roaring blaze, the entire theater was walled with fire.

"PEOPLE ARE BURNING!!

PLEASE HELP THEM!!! screamed someone from the roof, jumping two stories to the ground.

As the crowd stared in horror, police swarmed over him, clubs and bayonettes aimed to the ground where he had fallen. Within seconds, police killed him.

Shots rang out. People screamed from the roof. They were being shot! Two, then another two were breaking through the roof, scrambling to the edge ready to jump to the ground. They were being shot before they reached the ground.

Anyone who struggled out of the fire was being shot and clubbed. To one side, people noticed a section of the wall about to crumble. It was being broken through from inside and two or three people were frantically trying to get out to safety. The crowd rushed to rescue them. Before they reached the edge of the building and the people desperately trying to get out, police surrounded them, shoving with rifle butts and clubs, pushing them back. Struggling frantically against the police, people watched in agony as only two or three were able to escape, leaving behind scores of others trapped by falling timbers and totally drowned in flames.

The scene in front of the theater was now a pitched battle between crowds desperately trying to get to the doors and scores of police and troops fighting back all attempts at rescue. People could see that a struggle had broken out from behind the doors, coming from inside the theater. And they could see a solid wall of soldiers behind the police pushing against the doors to keep them shut.

Troops shoved, kicked and smashed rifle butts into the crowds. Police closed in tighter and tighter blocking all access to the building. Behind them, another solid wall of troops, shoving against the doors.

continued on next page

I.S.A. (member of CISNU) is an open, democratic and anti-imperialist organization of the Iranian students abroad that aims at the exposure of the reactionary nature of the Shah's regime among the people of the world. I.S.A. raises the voice of the Iranian people who are struggling against tyranny and oppression and echoes the cry of the mutilated political prisoners who courageously withstand the torture of the Shah's executioners. Through demonstrations, conferences, cultural programs and distribution of literature, I.S.A. struggles to make the people of the world aware of the plunder of Iran at the hands of the U.S. and other corporate powers. It works to mobilize international public opinion in support of the just struggle of the Iranian people for liberation and their aspiration for a free and independent Iran. **Resistance** is a monthly publication of the I.S.A. in the U.S. which aims to serve the above purposes. We urge all I.S.A. supporters and **Resistance** readers to subscribe to this publication through the mail. The annual subscription rates are \$3 in the U.S. and \$5 abroad.



We will never forget dear Eskandar; a member of ISA Oklahoma City chapter martyred by the Shah's goons.

• **At least one member of ISA was killed in the fire. 27 year old martyr Eskandar Ghanbar Zadeh and his 18 year old martyr brother Khosrow were burned alive. Several members of ISA lost their families and relatives in the fire.**

Shah's Inferno

The front of the building was now a raging inferno. It was 11:30. At 11 o'clock a truck carrying one water tank had pulled up several hundred feet from the theater. People ran in vain to bring it close to the blazing theater. It was a drinking water truck and was empty and couldn't use the oil company's hydrants, they were told.

Inside, the lights had gone out. The movie had started. Smoke curled into the theater. Within minutes, flames were all around them.

People had rushed the doors. They found them chained from the outside.

Heaving themselves against the main door, they had finally succeeded in breaking one door. As they tried to push through the door, they saw that they were shoving against a solid wall of troops, armed with machine guns, pushing them back inside the deadly fire!

"Anyone comes out—we'll shoot!" shouted the troops.

As the soldiers hurled themselves against the doors, shoving people back into the flames, one or two fought their way through. As they staggered forward, police plunged on top of them with clubs.

The doors had been re-chained. The death oven was sealed.

For four hours, the fire raged. Crowds battled and fought against the police, heaving desperately against the armed troops. By 2 a.m., they knew that everyone must be dead inside. And most of the people who had jumped from the roof had been shot, leaving only about a dozen people alive.

At 2 o'clock in the morning, one fire truck arrived. It pulled up several hundred feet from the blaze, so far away that the water couldn't even reach the ground floor.

Everyone inside was dead. THEN: the Army fire truck arrived. The Navy fire truck arrived. The National Iranian Oil Company fire truck arrived. And a petrochemical company fire truck arrived.

After everyone was dead, the fire trucks began to put out the fire.

Police kept up the barricade. Troops backed up the police. The crowd was pushed farther and farther back from the ruins of the theater and the charred remains of families, friends, and comrades.

From 2 a.m. until 5, troops could be seen pulling bodies out of the wreckage

and piling them onto army trucks. No one was ever allowed near the building or the bodies.

As dawn broke in Abadan on Sunday, August 20th, police and troop reinforcement arrived and by early morning a swarm of several hundred troops barricaded the entire area against crowds of shocked, horrified, grief stricken witnesses to one of the most desperate crimes of Pahlavi tyranny. It was not the first crime; it will not be the last. But as the burning sun rose over this scene of savage murder, the grief and shock and horror was already transforming into a raging, fearless revolutionary storm. Within hours, Abadan erupted with thundering calls of **DEATH TO THE PAHLAVI TYRANNY! DEATH TO THE SHAH! BURN HIM!**

By the next day, the Rex theater was surrounded by thousands of troops. No one was permitted near the scene.

By night, army trucks pulled up and loaded up with bodies and stole them away to mass graves in fear of people's furious and powerful rage.

At the cemetery, not one body was recognizable.

Two bulldozers, noticed by residents two days earlier near the cemetery, suddenly disappeared by Monday night. The drivers have not been seen since.

Five days before the fire, a Navy captain is reported to have told his officers, "don't go to any movies this week."

To this hour, Abadan has been in continuous demonstrations against the criminal regime. On the second day of mourning, at least 30,000 people rallied at one of the Mosques and erupted in demands for "DOWN WITH THIS FASCIST REGIME!" "DOWN WITH 50 YEARS OF PAHLAVI RULE!" "DEATH TO THE MURDERING SHAH!"

The entire city of Abadan, and hundreds of thousands of people throughout Iran, are swearing that only one thing will bring justice: the total extermination of Pahlavi rule in Iran.

Resistance will publish eyewitness accounts of the Rex Cinema fire in a future issue and we will continue to analyze the political significance of events in Iran as soon as we obtain factual accounts.

The extraordinary weakness and desperation of the regime is exposed in this inferno at Abadan. The American people, we earnestly hope, will join our efforts to inform progressive people everywhere that the struggle for independence and democracy being waged by our people is surging ahead more intensely than ever and deserves international support. At the same time, we urge our readers to demand facts from the press and to question the implications of the thundering silence from Carter's administration concerning their continued support to this modern day Hitler, the Shah of Iran.

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The idea is if you can convince people that the anti-Shah forces are heathens, irrational zealots, absolutely uncontrollable mobs, frenzied rioters without a shred of human reason in them—then you can try to say that the dictatorial rule of a tyrant backed by a gestapo police and the full force of the U.S. military are all needed to "restore order" and "maintain stability."

This was the purpose of the Abadan crime. We believe that its dangerous effects are outside Iran rather than inside simply because it is instantly clear to Iranians that the regime committed this atrocity, while outside there is still the barrage of misinformation and distortion. (In future issues we will provide news of the response to the outrage by our people.)

We ask our readers this question: in what similar instance of reporting have you read such consistent labeling of the opposition forces, including outright slurs against an entire religion and insinuations of lunacy in an entire people?

Yes, there are countless Moslems involved in the movement. It happens that 90 percent of the people in Iran are Moslems. But the basis for their opposition to the Shah has little to do with what religion is practiced or to what degree an individual practices his religion. The fact that certain ideals and cultural values are slaughtered and assaulted every day by the vulgar corruption of the Pahlavi Court and its coterie of lieutenants in the regime is one basis for political antagonism between the masses of people and reactionary rule in Iran.

It is the absolute right of any peoples in the world to cherish and protect and uphold their cultural values AS THEIR OWN and to oppose in every way the imposition of alien cultural values on them. The destruction of pornographic movies theaters, liquor stores, Pepsi trucks and U.S. and Europe banks expresses this:

The absolute opposition of our people to being subjected to vulgar movies, alcohol, carbonated chemicals, and international financial gambling at the expense of our entire way of life.

Is that so difficult to understand? Is that so surprising? Is that what people consider "fanatic"?????

We have to ask, and we are sure you must wonder, what function is served by these daily slanders against Iranian people, calling everyone who opposes repression and policy tyranny a "fanatic" and an "extremist."

WHO ARE THE REAL TERRORISTS IN IRAN?

Is it any secret that the Shah has tens of thousands of people in chains for their democratic beliefs? Is it any secret that the U.S. in the past few years has provided the regime with \$18 billion of the most modern weapons of war and police repression that are manufactured today? Is it any secret that absolutely not one human liberty prevails in Iran today? Is it an established fact that the Shah of Iran in 37 years has faced a roaring opposition from millions of impoverished people against his rule several times and that each time it has required the invasion of tanks, troops and more massacres to crush it?

It should be clear that since there can be no more pretense that the Shah is a "benevolent" monarch or anything else resembling humanity, the only thing that supporters of U.S. power in Iran can do is to slander the opposition to the Shah. By attacking the opposition and creating the impression outside Iran that everyone in the movement, or a majority of its leaders, are "fanatics" and "terrorists" and somehow beyond all reason, they aim to create justification for continued repression and direct U.S. intervention against the movement for independence and freedom. □

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Why Are 35 Million People Being Called "Fanatics"?

The atrocious fire at Abadan has raised the level of written propaganda to its most exaggerated extremes in the international press. But, in particular, we would like to look at some of the aspects of the media handling of events in Iran to substantiate our claim that there is evidence of "unique" treatment of news on Iran by the media.

First of all, we want to clarify that we do not lump "the press" into one monolithic bloc. We do not believe that every reporter in the U.S. press is busy in their editorial rooms hatching "plots" against the Iranian people or Iranian students. In fact, our experience has often been that local reporters and journalists are honest professionals who have sought frequently to learn facts and investigate the truth of events in Iran. Unfortunately, there is a different situation that prevails in some particular arenas of the press where editorial boards *DO* have consistent *policies* with regard to their line on the Shah's regime and with regard to their portrayal of the movement.

On the one side you are told that the beleaguered Shah of Iran, keeper of the dungeons, is valiantly trying to bring "modernization" to Iran; on the other side, you are told that there is an inexplicable, somehow "irrational mob" (which mysteriously includes the majority of the residents of virtually every city and town and most villages in the country) that just won't get the hang of it and just won't "go along" with these noble programs of the Shah.

WHERE IS THE BELIEVABLE TRUTH IN ALL THIS?

Either the Shah really is a modernizing, "enlightened" despot (whatever that contradiction means) who is trying mightily to bring good things to the masses—AND the majority of Iranian people are insane because they oppose this—

OR, the Shah is exactly what the masses say he is and their struggle to overthrow him and replace tyranny with a democratic republic is a thoroughly justified and progressive struggle deserving of support from every corner of the globe.

Unfortunately the damage and destruction done by these words is not



The anger of 30,000 manifested in one of many bloody anti-Shah demonstrations in Abadan.

limited to the realm of ideas. If this were the case, we would never bother to spend thousands of words trying to unravel the myths and distortions and outright lies that you are being fed about Iran. Unfortunately and tragically, people's lives are at stake.

These words are creating a climate of opinion surrounding the movement in Iran. To what extent it succeeds depends on the degree to which people begin to speak out against what they know is false, and clearly explain what they know is true. Only in this way, can American and Iranian people together prevent further bloodshed and massacre of thousands of people whose struggle is for freedom and democratic liberties and an independent country that upholds and cherishes its own values and culture and determines its own system of government according to the will of the masses of Iranian people.

Public justifications for U.S. Government support of their ally, the Shah of Iran are wearing pretty thin. So thin that not one official statement has been heard during 10 months of rebellion inside the country that is "by far the largest U.S. security assistance program in the world." (p. 37, "U.S. Military Sales to Iran," Staff Report to the Subcommittee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, July 1976)

Instead, it seems that the Shah of Iran is being clothed in various disguises, and the entire anti-Shah op-

position is being systematically and uniquely slandered through the medium of the major U.S. press agencies.

Unable to convince an intelligent public that the Royal superintendent of SAVAK torture chambers is a "progressive democrat," the backers of the Shah have tried one myth after another.

Shaking on his throne from 10 solid months of relentless and spirited uprisings by virtually the entire society, the Shah has been paraded before the world dressed in one set after another of the Emperor's New Clothes: the "enlightened despot" is sometimes the vanguard of "modernization" and even the "king of independence in the third world."

Against the realities of savage police brutality, street massacres, and the outright sale of Iran to the U.S. military while millions live in squalor—these myths can safely and accurately be called lies.

But the truth does not yet prevail in terms of the information reaching most Americans about the Shah and this vast popular movement to overthrow him.

WHY DID THE SHAH BURN PEOPLE ALIVE?

The horror of the Rex Cinema fire in Abadan, the deliberate burning alive of as many as 750 men, women and children in a working class

neighborhood theater, is a new level of attack—both in deeds and in words—against the millions of people fighting literally for their lives against the Shah's regime and all forces backing him.

The Abadan fire is a desperate attempt to seize back the political power that has been torn from the hands of the regime by events of the past 10 months. What else is left to a regime that has only its SAVAK gestapo and the brute force of machine guns except to commit such an act and try to blame it on the peoples' movement? It almost sounds beyond reason that such a tactic would be thinkable—but we are dealing here with a dynasty whose power originated in terror and has been maintained with terror for 50 years. A regime that is capable of the crimes already exposed to the world—the repression and torture and complete suppression of all liberties, the desperate poverty of the people—is quite capable of organizing the deliberate murder of hundred of people in the Rex Cinema.

And since few politicians can openly support a known fascist, and it is impossible to turn public opinion directly in favor of fascism, the only possibility for backers of the status quo in Iran is to paint a picture of the opposition as "unfit to rule," "unfit for democracy."

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