

## **Oil And Gas Workers Industrial Actions And Associated Problems: A Micro-Macro Theoretical Integration**

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**Abstract:** On sundry occasions, NUPENG and PENGASSAN, trade unions in Nigeria which encompass oil and gas workers have embarked on industrial actions. These industrial actions impacted on the Nigerian society and on individuals. It is imperative to situate theoretically these industrial actions and associated impacts. Owing to the micro level and macro level theoretical divide which had been an issue in sociological theorizing; it was necessary to use Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination to explain the impacts of the oil and gas workers industrial actions. This paper observed that there is a dialectical relationship between public issues and private problems, thus a social problem that arise from the NUPENG and PENGASSAN industrial actions can also generate personal problems; the same way personal problems generated could become public issues. Thus, the paper established that oil and gas workers' industrial actions generated impacts are intertwined with private problems and public issues.

**Keywords:** Industrial actions, theory, micro theory, macro theory, private problems, public issues and theoretical integration.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In the investigation of social issues, sociologists adopt theories in the explanation of the observed issues. In this bid, sociologists adopt different perspectives, methods and values that suit their orientation. Theories which, in the opinion of Bryjak and Soroka (2001:13), refer to a set of logically coherent, interrelated concepts that attempts to explain some observable phenomena or group of facts, are utilized for a proper understanding and explanation of the social world.

While it is imperative to point out that all sociologists who explain the social world utilize theories, it is apparent that sociologists differ in their choice of theories and values. Sociologists in their theoretical divide adopt either structural theories which are macro in nature, and/or micro-theories. Structural sociological theories such as structural functionalism, conflict theory and some variants of neo-Marxian theory (especially economic determinism) stress the importance of society in shaping human behaviour; therefore the unit of analysis is the social network and not the individual (Mayhew, 1980:349; Haralambos and Holborn, 2008:17). On the polar side of structuralists are the micro-extreme side such as symbolic interactionists, exchange theorists, rational choice theorists, and ethno-methodologists. The micro-theorists' emphasis is on the individual and not the social. They tend not to value the higher level of abstraction. The micro-theorists are concerned with small scale, micro-level social phenomena and their analyses stem from a rather widely perceived subjectivistic perspective unlike the structuralists whose analyses are mostly perceived to be objectively based.

These two polar theoretical extremists have seemingly been at war with each other, over methods, perspectives and values. Sequel to this theoretical divide, Mill (1959) in Haralambos and Holborn (2008:17) gave a clue to the issue of sociological theoretical divide. Mills argued that the sociological imagination is the solution to the problem of differing theoretical orientations. He stressed that through the sociological imagination society could comprehend their private problems in terms of public issues. In the conception of Mills, the sociological imagination is not beneficial to only the sociologists, but rather the whole society. Similarly, Kemeny (1976:731) argued for a synergy between micro-macro distinctions. Still in the bid of linking micro-macro

theoretical orientations, Alexander, Giesen, Munch and Smelser (1987:385) argued for the joining of the two theoretical divide.

In order to eschew the aforementioned conflict between micro and macro theorists, some theorists have begun the adoption of Mills sociological imagination in their theorizing. Ritzer (2008:503) refers us to how he had successfully adopted an integrative micro-macro approach in “Expressing America: A Critique of the Global Credit Card Society”. In the same vein, Giddens’ Structuralist theory emphasized the link of personal and public issues. He detests theories that begin with agent i.e. individual and structure (society). He therefore drew the relationship between agency and structuration.

Following the theoretical orientation of Mills and the footsteps of other theorists, this paper discussed the private problems and public issues emanating from the oil and gas workers industrial actions, represented by National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN industrial actions.

The oil and gas workers industrial actions have affected individuals, relative organizations and invariably not left the society and its terrain free of its impact. When NUPENG and PENGASSAN embark on a longer period of industrial actions, the society is affected. There has always been dearth of petroleum resources at the petrol filling stations, thus the economy suffers drastically. In this wise owing to the impact on the economy of the country, individuals are prone to be negatively impacted on. There is no free movement of trade – in this way society suffers the same way as individuals and organizations; production is thus affected. Furthermore, individual commuters in the four modes of transportation namely, road, sea, rail and air mode of transport highly feel the impact the same way the society bears the brunt of the industrial actions. Scarcity of petroleum products caused by failure or refusal of NUPENG and PENGASSAN to distribute these products necessitates a hike in fare chargeable by transporters and this in turn brings hardship on commuters. Individuals therefore react to this condition in different ways, and such reactions have consequences for society as a whole. Having apprised readers of the direction of this paper, it is pertinent to point out that the aim of this paper is to elucidate how the oil and gas workers industrial actions generate personal troubles and public issues. In this way the paper developed a theory that dealt with the linkage between micro and macro levels of social , as against the analysis of micro and macro theories as some theorists do, both of which according to Ritzer (2008:501) constitute the major strands of work on micro – macro integration.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted analytical method, which is solely based on description of the social phenomena. Thus the methodology relied on the observation of social reality and review of relevant intellectual works from text books, journal articles and newspapers.

### **Nupeng And Pengassan Profile And State Of Rights And Expression In Nigeria**

The oil and gas workers in Nigeria are confined under two major umbrellas or unions. Therefore all or most oil and gas workers belong to either NUPENG or PENGASSAN. These two unions constitute oil workers union hence any reference in this paper to oil and gas workers is a reference to NUPENG and PENGASSAN.

Owing to the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in Nigeria in 1956 at Oloibiri, in the present day Bayelsa State, there arose the need to have employees to work in the oil industry. Sequel to the complexities of oil exploration and exploitation activities, workers of the servicing oil companies resorted to forming unions. This stems from the fear of capitalist exploitative power. Giddens (2009:899) affirmed that in capitalist societies union organisations exist in most countries of the world, and that where unions exist, governments loyally recognise the right of workers to withdraw their labour – to embark on strike in pursuit of economic objectives. Giddens further stressed that unions developed as a means of redressing the imbalance of power between workers and employers.

NUPENG had its formal registration in Nigeria to function as a trade union on 15 August, 1978. For easy administration and operations, the union is divided into four zones. They are Lagos zone, Warri zone, Port Harcourt zone and Kaduna zone. They all have their zonal offices. As a union of workers in a capitalist system, it has a vision to organize, protect and promote, and defend the socio-economic and political interests of the oil and gas workers in Nigeria. As contained in its constitution, the union’s objectives are as follows:

- To ensure the complete unionization of all workers in the petroleum and gas industry.
- To obtain and maintain a just and equitable general conditions of service.
- To regulate the relations and settle dispute between members and employers, and between a member and another.
- To advance the education and training of members.
- To provide benefits and other assistance as provided in the constitution.
- To protect and advance the socio-economic and cultural interest of the community and such other objectives as are lawful and are not in conflict with the spirit and practice of trade unionism.

- To encourage the participation of members in decision making in the undertaking both at industrial and national levels.
- To promote and encourage international fraternal relations with bodies having the interest of petroleum and gas workers.
- To establish and carry on or participate (financially or otherwise) in the business of the printing or publishing of a general newspaper or of any other undertaking, industrial purpose of furthering the interest of the union or trade unionism generally.

NUPENG membership is open to all junior workers in the oil well and natural gas well operations in the industry including the general tasks of prospecting, drilling, crude oil and natural extraction of oil and natural gas, pipelines, refining distribution and marketing of natural gas and petroleum products, not excluding petroleum tanker driver (Haulage). Membership is not limited to a particular sex, religion, belief or ethnic origin. It entails all persons working in the oil and gas sector. PENGASSAN as a workers union of all senior staff who is in temporary or regular employment in the oil and gas sector was formerly registered as a trade union on August 15, 1978. It presently has its national headquarters located at 288 Ikorodu Road, Anthony Village, Lagos and Zonal Offices in Lagos, Warri, Port Harcourt and Kaduna. PENGASSAN has the following as its mission:

- To safeguard and protect the jobs of her members.
- To ensure a safe and healthy working environment for its members.
- To improve the terms and conditions of employment.
- To support and promote legislation in the interest of her members in particular and Nigeria in general.
- To render assistance to other trade union organisations in the spirit of cooperation and solidarity.

As pointed out in Aswathapa (2002:482), workers in the early period join unions for the purpose of protecting themselves against exploitation by management; similarly, the primary function of labour unions is to regulate the terms and conditions of employment of workers. Hence management makes unionization less attractive to employees, when it makes work conditions more satisfying. These oil workers often engage in industrial action often times to register their displeasure with the management of their respective companies and the government, which is the umpire in the labour management relations. Industrial action, in the opinion of Scott and Marshal (2005:298) means certain sanctions which are available to groups of workers and employers in dispute with each other over employment conditions. These sanctions are what industrial relations specialist call forms of industrial action. They include but are not limited to strike, work-to-rule, the lock in/out, overtime ban, and picketing.

Often times the oil and gas workers have embarked on industrial actions to express their rights. These rights were granted employees so as to reduce their exploitations in the work place as well as possessing the power to express their interests and opinions without hindrance. Articles 23 and 24 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 expressed the need for workers to have their rights protected. Similarly, section 40 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria gives the power of freedom of association on workers and also gives them right to life. Again, the Nigeria Labour Act, Section 9(6) Cap 198 LFN 1990) provides amongst others that the employment contract shall:

- Make it a condition of employment that a worker shall or shall not join a trade union, or shall not relinquish membership of a trade union or
- Cause the dismissal of or otherwise prejudice a worker by reason of trade union membership, or because of trade union activities outside working hours or, with the consent of the employer, within working hours or by reason of the fact that he has lost or been deprived of membership of a trade union or has refused or been unable to become or for any other reason is not, member of a trade union.

In addition, section 24 of the Trade Union Act (Cap 437, LFN, 1990) stressed inter alia:

- (a) Subject to this section, where there is a trade union having employees of an employer as members, they shall, without any assurance, or registration in accordance with this Act be entitled to be recognized as a trade union.
- (b) Where an employer deliberately fails to recognize any trade union registered pursuant to the provision of sub section (1) of this section, he shall be guilty of an offence and be liable to a fine of ₦1, 000.

Furthermore, sequel to the rights conferred on the oil and gas workers through their unions to express their right, NUPENG and PENGASSAN have embarked on sundry industrial actions. Few cases will be explained. It is a well known fact that NUPENG and PENGASSAN embarked on industrial action on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1994. Okougbo (2013:146 – 148) averred that it was the longest strike in Nigeria and it resulted to the overthrow of the then military governments of Nigeria. The oil and gas workers also organized another nationwide strike in the second quarter of 2003 (Amadi, 2010:35).

The Tide of Friday, June 15, 2012 page 8, reported that members of the Tanker Drivers segment of NUPENG embarked on another industrial action. Adebowale in the Eagle online, July 2, 2013, wrote that the News Agency of Nigeria reports that NUPENG on Monday commenced a three day warning strike over alleged

unfair labour practices. The aforementioned cases of the oil and gas workers engagement in industrial action is just a pointer to the fact that the oil and gas workers have on several occasions engaged in industrial actions with consequent personal problems causing public issue. "Personal problems are those problems that affect an individual and those people immediately around him or her" (Ritzer,2008:503). The next section will show how individuals and society are affected during these industrial action periods.

### **Impacts Of Oil And Gas Workers' Industrial Actions**

In this section, it will be apt to consider cases in which oil and gas workers industrial actions have had impacts on society thus causing private problems.

Ubbels & Nathaly (2009:1) averred that strikes have frequent occurrence rate and that few studies are available on the impact of public transport strikes. However, among the available literature, Rietveld and Van Exel (2001:1) opined that in many countries, strikes affect public transport sector from time to time and that they occur even in the economic sector. He maintained that strikes which occur frequently tend to make transport rather unreliable and less attractive to travelers in general. Rietveld and Van Exel hold firmly the fact that the travelers behaviour depends on the type of strike. The outcome of their research reveals that strikes in public transport do affect travelers; perhaps for the fact that during the industrial action period, one cannot adopt the preferred mode of transport.

Therefore, one has to stay at home or choose an alternative mode of commuting. This difficulty is real owing to the fact that the four means of transportation, namely road, rail, air and sea transport utilize petroleum products for the efficient working of the objects of transportation. Akpan and Nnamseh (2014:25) argued that petrol scarcity is a malady and a serious economic problem in Nigeria.

In addition, it is a truism that strike affects the economic life of people. Coon (1998:13) aptly opined that people lose their ambition, morals and wealth when they are unable to work. In his studies, "the ripple effect of union strikes; a case study of the micro and macroeconomic effects of the general motors' strike of 1998" discovered among other factors that the United Auto Workers Strike at General Motors in the summer of 1998 had a large impact on both the microeconomic and the macroeconomic levels. It is observed that in most strikes, the economy bears the major brunt of the industrial action (Anyim, Chidi and Ogunyomi ,2012) in Ajewole (2014:101). It is a truism to state that if the economy is affected the society is affected as well as individuals. It should be pointed out that when the industrial action involves petroleum products, the impact in always severe. Ayakwah and Mohammed (2014:13-23) in a study conducted about fuel price adjustments and growth of final and medium scale enterprises in the new Juaben Municipality in Ghana, contend that fuel as a major energy consumed has its price in an unpredictable manner. Thus fuel as a commercial product affects the micro and macro economy of every nation.

These economic impacts are just one of the impacts caused by NUPENG and PENGASSAN industrial actions. Other problems will be deduced from the following cases. Adugbo et al. in Daily Trust of Sunday 8 March, 2015, reported that long queues resurfaced in many filling stations around the country as Nigeria's two major oil workers unions, NUPENG and PENGASSAN, commenced a three-day nationwide warning strike. The strike attracted an increment in the sale of petroleum products where available. This led to an increase in transportation fare by the end users – transporters. Similarly, Beemene in the weekend Tide, Saturday December 1, 2017 page 11 reports that the industrial action embarked on by the Eastern Zonal Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers left in its place tales of endless woes among Port Harcourt residents. The Paper (Tide) revealed owing to its investigation that there was acute shortage of petroleum products within the few days of the strike action. Respondents to the weekend Tide, Saturday, December 1, 2007, did regret the fact that the masses were bearing the grave impact of the industrial action. One Abbot Udo, a respondent to the Tide was reported to have said that his business has suffered adversely owing to the fuel scarcity caused by the NUPENG strike. Another commercial driver named Mr. Good Friday Bira, reportedly said that some drivers including him and car owners have already packed their cars sequel to the dearth of petrol. In the same way did majority of residents lament the unpleasant realities of the industrial action. Oluoh in the Tide, Wednesday, October 21, 2015, reports that a survey round the City of Port Harcourt, capital of Rivers State, reveal that black market operators and street fuel hawkers have doubled in their numbers as they now have great patronage even as they sell at exorbitant prices.

Ukiwo, in Daily SUNRAY, Tuesday August 16, 1994 page 11, on one of the industrial actions states that the present crisis in Nigeria is hurting all Nigerians in one way or the other. Also, Ejorh, in the African Guardian of August 8, 1994 page 23 corroborated such view. It commented that the NUPENG strike has eaten deep into the very core of the nation's economic life. An illustration of the relative state of affairs is the geometric increase in cost of transport and commodities. In view of this fact the paper stressed:

Last week at the Oshodi Market, in Lagos, a bag of garri sold for as much as ₦650 compared to its price of ₦400 a forth night ago. A bag of beans rose to ₦2000 from ₦1200, a medium sized tuber of yam jolted up to ₦70 from ₦30; while a bag of yam flour which until now commanded a low profit, meteorically shot up to

₦2000 from between ₦700 and ₦800 it was sold for earlier. Most Nigerian families have now adjusted their feeding habits to conform with the current trend. Investigations showed that low income Nigerians are mostly affected by this.

From all indications the oil and gas workers through their industrial actions have caused Nigerians untold hardship. Okougbo (2013:153) argued that NUPENG has over the years played a vital role in Nigeria body politic acting as agent of social change. He said that “When NUPENG sneezes, the nation catches cold”.

Aboluwade and Nnodim in PUNCH of Wednesday July 3, 2013 page 27 also gave their view concerning oil and gas workers industrial actions. It reported Nigerians condemnation of the action thus: Thompson Ayodele, a motorist said ‘I have been here for more than three hours, and I heard that some people slept here last night. Can you imagine that? Commuting has been very difficult and a lot of workers have been left stranded. This must not continue.

In another dimension of the impact of strikes by oil and gas workers on Nigerians, Badom (2018:302) stressed that NUPENG and PENGASSAN industrial actions cause scarcity of petroleum products. This scarcity of petroleum products in turn causes other intractable problems on individuals and the society. Amongst others, he argued that inability to pay increased transport fare causes some persons to trek long distance even in the night thus exposing them to the security threat of those who have also been beaten by the pangs of the strike, but would want to remedy the pangs through theft. Badom also observed low business patronage, commuting problems, and low productivity owing to dearth of petroleum products. Most productive workers arrive places of work late, thus affecting productivity. Also, high cost of living and scarcity of petroleum products exist at a wider level.

We have thus far discussed the impacts which are fall outs of the oil and gas workers industrial actions. The next attempt is to harmonize these problems scattered over the individual and society with integrating micro and macro problems derived from the industrial actions.

### **Impacts Of Oil And Gas Workers Industrial Actions On Interface With Personal Troubles And Public Issues**

As earlier on stressed, the notion of integrating personal troubles with public issues is an attempt to express a theory under the auspices of Mills’ ‘Sociological imagination’. In this bid, we shall integrate the micro level personal troubles and the macro level public issues.

Theoretical integration is defined as “the act of combining two or more sets of logically interrelated propositions into one larger, set of interrelated propositions, in order to provide a more comprehensive explanation of a particular phenomenon” (Thornberry, 1989:75). This method is not without some advantages and disadvantages. These are treated in Muftic (2009:5).

We shall in the task of theory integration, integrate personal troubles with public issues from the oil and gas workers industrial actions. “Personal troubles are those problems that affect an individual and those people immediately around him or her” (Ritzer, 2008:503), while public issues are problems that affect large numbers of people, perhaps society as a whole.

In this paper, personal troubles are treated as private problems and can be used interchangeably. It is pertinent to stress that the need for NUPENG and PENGASSAN to embark on industrial action against management or the government is because they want some demands to be met in the interest of the oil and gas workers.

In the opinion of Fashoyin (1992:178), a worker who engages in strike is very much aware of the impacts of his action. “Naturally, his primary concern is himself; he is concerned about the economic and social consequences of the strikes to him. He is however equally aware that his action will have an impact on the community. Therefore, the worker’s decision to take part in a strike would be balanced between the eventual gain (or loss) accruing to him on the one hand, and the consequences of his action on the community on the other”. In this regard, NUPENG and PENGASSAN are consciously aware of the impacts of their industrial actions on the macro level causing public issue and on the micro level necessitating personal troubles. There is a dialectical relationship between public issues and personal troubles in the case of oil and gas workers industrial actions.

It is a well known fact that each time NUPENG and PENGASSAN embark on industrial action, there is always dearth of petroleum resources. This stems from the fact that the supply chain is broken and the entire Nigeria wider society is affected. It has always been the case that petroleum products influence transportation, businesses, social life and the general economy of the nation. When these oil and gas workers stop the distribution of petroleum products, the society is always in disarray. A visit to petrol filling stations reveals that chaos is the order of the day as motorists struggle to get the available fuel. This condition had therefore thrown the wider Nigerian society to predicament thus making it a public issue as most sectors or units of the Nigerian society are disturbed. In each of these periods of oil and gas workers industrial actions almost every person within the societal terrain is widely reached in terms of feeling the impact on society. For society to be working, every sector must be working. When the petroleum and gas sector fails to work, the Nigerian society suffers

dismally. Society requires petroleum products for the transportation to be effective. When it fails to function effectively on a wide scale society is dismally affected.

When the issue of society is mentioned some do not comprehend it. Society is defined as “self perpetuating groups of people who occupy a given territory and interact with one another on the basis of a shared culture” ( Bryjak and Soroka,2001:65). People form society and it is in this society that these industrial actions take place. These industrial actions within Nigeria or any other society become public issue as far as the issue affects a large number of people. These actions often times on each occasion affect the entire society. This is the reason the economy as a functional unit is affected and the economy is part of society. In the Punch Newspaper of Thursday August 23, 2012 page 2, it was reported that owing to the industrial actions of the oil and gas workers, Olisah Metuh, the then PDP Publicity Secretary remarked as follows:

The decision by NUPENG to embark on a nationwide strike over the decision by the Federal Government to stick to unimpeded transparency in the payment of subsidy claims is unpatriotic and bare faced insensitivity to the outcry of Nigerians over the rot in the oil industry as well as a clear inclination to use the pivotal position of the union to promote actions that are inimical to our economy.

When the economy is affected on a wide scale it portends a societal issue which can also predispose individual to problems. Instances abound where these public issues of oil and gas workers induced scarcity of petroleum products cause personal problems.

It is a truism that this public issue has caused personal problems in the spheres of insecurity, low productivity to agencies and smaller organisations, trekking when there are no vehicles or individual cannot afford the increment in transport fare. When there is widespread NUPENG and PENGASSAN industrial actions, petrol filling stations do not sell petroleum products. Transporters buy it from black market, usually at an increased rate. Sequel to the forces of the demand, transportation fare will certainly increase. On these occasions people arrive places of work late, thus reducing productivity at organisational level. This is because sometimes people walk long distances to places of work, also causing stress for one who walks long distance. Even if this is a form of exercise, long distances could be very strength sapping and equally unpleasant for the unhealthy person.

Besides, on these occasions, some persons who walk long distances as have been observed are often times assaulted by thieves who also are suffering because of the widespread issue of fuel scarcity from the NUPENG and PENGASSAN case. This explains the fact that during this period, prices of commodities are increased because of the power of demand and supply. A marketer who boards a speed boat, train, vehicle, etc. that attract an increment on transportation will definitely increase the price of commodities. When the prices of commodities are increased, it becomes a widespread problem for society that affects an individual whose lack of wherewithal may affect his purchasing power. When individuals’ lack of wherewithal to purchase commodities owing to a reasonable increase is on a wide scale, individual problems result to public issues and in this manner people in Nigeria would have felt the impact of these industrial actions.

In another way, as expressed above, individuals who utilize the opportunity of waylaying other individuals who could not afford the incremental fare, perhaps as a way of making ends meet as is usual, has broken the norms. If these as have been reported happens on a wider scale, it is apparent that the individual problems of stealing from individual distance trekkers on the way have resulted to anomie. Pirates are seen in great number around the sea. They steal from individual transporters because they are fully aware that security personnel who protect the sea borders are not on duty, owing to lack of petroleum products. This breakdown of rules invariably affects individuals and society.

Furthermore, during one of those industrial actions, because of the length of industrial actions, some persons decided to buy petroleum products at the initial stage in gallons, so as not to feel the impact much. Unknown to family friends who took a lantern to where the products were stored, the entire household and neighbourhood were caught in an inferno which became a public issue and the government had to come in to solve their personal problems. The fact that several citizens lost their lives in the inferno gives the government the perceived need to attend to what has become a public issue of mass destruction. Individual families who were caught in the web of the inferno undoubtedly have their personal problems emanating from the loss of their family members. As it is apparent, some would be engrossed in obsessive thinking of managing life without the family member caught in the inferno which was caused by fuel hoarding. This prevails most especially if such family member caught in the inferno was the bread winner. Such obsessive thinking could aggravate some other risky conditions which places the individual obsessed in a personal trouble.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

This work has shown that the oil and gas industrial actions often times embarked on in Nigeria are not without impacts. That NUPENG and PENGASSAN are trade unions that encompass oil and gas workers. This points out that as a trade union group they have some rights to express their chagrin at management or the government over matters of employment or matters that concern their interest. NUPENG and PENGASSAN

have since formation embarked on a number of industrial actions. These industrial actions have greatly affected the Nigerian society – this is what we call public issue. Equally, individuals in the country are not without the brunt of these impacts. This is what we call private troubles or personal troubles. We have observed that there is a dialectical relationship between public issues and personal troubles and deem it necessary to discuss these problems with the orientation of drawing a link between macro and micro theories in the discussion of theories so as to bridge the gap of macro and micro theory disintegration. The paper recommends the integration of micro-macro theories in social theorizing in order to present holistic analysis and investigation of society.

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