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DEF KLERK'S

1 be South African President canâ\200\231t seem to shake the Comparisor

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with the former Soviet leader, or its unwelcome implication.

PROBLEM

A reformerâ\200\234 hold on power may be tenuous. BY BILL KELLER

HREE DAYS AFTER A ZULU HORDE SHOT AND SLASHED ITS WAY THROUGH THE BLACK South African township of Boipatong last June, President F. W. de Klerk climbed into the back seat of his presidential limousine and led a motorcade into the stricken settlement, where he expected to dismount and deliver his condolences to the bereaved. However bitter the townshipâ\200\231s pain, whatever the political agitators said, de Klerk was confident that ordinary blacks did not hold him responsible. He was wrong. The townspeople, convinced that de Klerkâ\200\231s police had conspired in the slaughter, had to be fended off by machine-gun-toting security guards, as they chanted their fury at the white President until he abandoned his mission and fled.

Watching the feckless President chased from the township, I thought I recognized his expression, that forced smile tightening into a rigid grimace. I had seen it on Mikhail Gorbachevâ\200\231s face two years earlier, when a fist-shaking column of Soviet citizens marched into Red Square on the heels of the May Day parade, screeching â\200\234Resign!â\200\235 and â\200\234Shame!â\200\235 at the Kremlin leadership.

It was the look of a leader witnessing for the first time the wrath of citizens whose feelings he had thought he understood, whose esteem he had taken for granted, though he had never sought their votes.

Few things seem to annoy F. W. de Klerk more than the suggestion that he is South Africaâ\200\231s

Bill Keller is the Johannesburg bureau chief for The New York Times. From 1986 to 1991, he reported for The Times from Moscow, winning the Pulitzer Prize for international reporting in 1989.

ILLUSTRATIONBY ANITA KUNZ

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Gorbachev. The comparison, which has tempted pundits since de Klerk became President in 1989, seems obvious: two lawyer-politicians who come to power in their early 50's at moments of generational change in their countries, who_ renounce the-

repressive official ideology, free dissidents from prison, un-ban the political opposition, extricate

their armies from foreign military quagmires - and win their pariah states readmission to the :

club of civilized nations. = .~

For a time, de Klerk sideste making light of it. â\200\234There are some comparisons to be drawn,â\200\235 he liked to say, running a hand over his bald pate. â\200\234For instance, our hair style is quite the same.â\200\235 - e i ;

Nowadays he is weary of the question. â\200\234I op-

pose that comparison,â\200\235 he told a British inter-

viewer in November. â\200\234Firstly, we have a sound economy â\200\224 I donâ\200\231t face that problem. Secondly, I.

am not trying to reform apartheid, I am replacing it.â\200\235 His resistance is understandable. Gorbachev, after all, is now widely perceived as a failure.

But for anyone who has watched the two leaders in action, the comparison has only become more irresistible as de Klerkâ\200\231s efforts to negotiate an orderly surrender of power have run into trouble. Like Gorbachev, de Klerk finds it is not â\202¬asy to appease either those of his own tribe who are being asked to give up power and privilege, or those in the popular majority who are asked to be content with less than immediate gratification. Like Gorbachev, he is attempting this feat of orderly political transition in a shriveling economy. Like Gorbachev, de Klerkiscastina partnership with collaborators he cannot control, including both the popular leaders he freed and the Procrustean security apparatus he inherited. Like Gorbachev, de Klerk seems to have lost his once unerring footing on the new political terrain.

â\200\234De Klerk reminds me of Gorbachev more and more, especially during the last two years,â\200\235 says Irina Filatova, a Moscow historian who has been visiting South Africa since 1989, and now teaches at the University of Durban. â\200\234It seems to me that Gorbachev had run out of his resources during the last year of his power, maybe even earlier. He didnâ\200\231t know where to go and he couldnâ\200\231t sacrifice anything else. That is exactly what is happening with de Klerk. There is nothing else he can sacrifice. His electorate is leaving him, and he wonâ\200\231t have any new electorate.â\200\235

De Klerk, like Gorbachev, is the instigator of a reform that, for the great majority of his country's people, has changed everything and nothing. The inequality of black and white is still profound, the violence endemic, the majority disfranchised. Here, as in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev, there is more glasnost than perestroika (or, as pundits here call it, Pretoriastroika). And like Gorbachev, de Klerk seems increasingly worried that the fire he lit will rage into an uncontrollable conflagration.

Philip Nel, a South African Sovietologist at Stellenbosch University, says that until recently he rejected the analogy. The real South African Gorbachev, Nel felt, was de Klerk's predecessor, P. W. Botha, who began to dismantle apartheid but then lost his nerve and reverted to authoritarian habits.

Now I wonder if the same is not going to happen with de Klerk, Nel says. Circumstances have forced both leaders to abandon some of the more starry-eyed ideals they started with just to restore stability in society.

De Klerk is right, of course, that such compared the analogy by -

It seems that

sons are simplistic. They do not fully explain the past or foretell the future. Still, charting the

- trajectories of the two men and their societies,
- their similarities and some telling differences, is

auseful way to assess both places and to contemplate the universal perils of reform. :

OUTH AFRICA AND WHAT USED TO

.~ - be the Soviet Union are different places, - and yet their predicaments have much in common. They are remote lands transformed by European zealots into living laboratories of misbegotten ideology. In one, the social theologians decreed that mankind was an undifferentiated mass; in the other they elevated differences of skin color and language to Holy Writ.

These mirror-image faiths produced leaders who depended on the same levers of power - force and patronage - which, in the absence of accountability, soon became ruthlessness and

corruption. A Soviet citizen would feel instantly at home with the rude inefficiency of the Afrikaner

bureaucracy that runs the South African postal service. And the fabulous graft of black homelands like Lebowa and KwaNdebele is in the same league with the thievery of Leonid Brezhnev's high-living provincial satraps in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. Both countries had their idiosyncratic forms of police torture, their night searches and disappearances, their smashed families and wholesale forced relocations.

They are countries made inward-looking by the world's disapproval. Among the traits white South Africans and Russians have in common is the odd mix of defensiveness and yearning for approval that flourishes in ostracized societies. In either place, a foreigner will be interrogated with desperate expectation about his impressions. At the same time, the locals take comfort in the failings of other societies. Perhaps the only country where America's race riots, homelessness and crime get the kind of smug attention they used to get in the Soviet Union is South Africa.

A less obvious but important similarity is that in both societies, by the early 1980s at least, it

the Afrikanersâ\200\231 deferrinaâ\200\224

tion never again to be sub--

ordinate.

De Klerkâ\200\231s generation, ob- " served Philip Nel, â\200\234experi- - - ended - the National â\200\230Party " only as the party in power not as the party that had to - fight so hard in the 30â\200\231s and Â° 40â\200\231s. So both de Klerk and - Gorbachev, when they came - to power, had the task of -

managing the continuation

of something they had no . ; : .- ganization by espousing cau- -

part in building.â\200\235 For the South Africans of

this transitional generation, the Khrushchev figure (he would wince to hear the comparison) was P. W. Botha, a table-thumping milita- i - rist who nonetheless had a-

_ Premonition that the old way would not endure. â\200\234Adapt or dieâ\200\235 was Bothaâ\200\231s slogan; like Khrushchev, he stimulated the appetites of his junior cabinet members with promises of reform and then left them hungry. R

â\200\234By 1985, the National Par-

ty had taken a decision, which - â\200\230 became policy in 1986, that all

people would become equal

citizens of South Africa,â\200\235 says -

Jan Pieter de Lange, chair-

man of the influential secret . society of Afrikaner elite,â\200\235 the Broederbond. â\200\234That was

P. W. Botha,- pronouncing the death sentence of apart-

â\200\234heid. But not executing that . - Â»".was forever wary of his right -~ was born (in Johannesburg . â\200\234flank, de Klerk was securely ' into a comfortable and in-

death sentence.â\200\235 .-

Weakened by - fallmg health and paralyzed by his - military school fear of dis- -

order, Botha stopped in his

tracks. The younger mem-"s \ â\200\234F
1990, within five months of his -
-election as President, he dis- >
*.avowed apartheid, lifted the ~*â\200\231adolescence â\200\230as leaders â\200\230and -

bers of his cabinet chafed
for . three years until a
stroke, :in [January 1989,
forced Botha to retire, first

Losing g';;ï¬\201nwd,ul1992).

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from hisâ\200\234.'lÃ©adÃ©r's"hip of the -

National Party, then seven

SAency. SIEL Âft~ :

* De Klerk won the party -

. months later from the pres-

â\200\234leadership -~ â\200\234and became
â\200\230 â\200\234heir apparent to the presi- "

â\200\230dency â\200\224'by a handful of

â\200\234votes, defeating a younger

and more sophisticated pro-

â\200\234gressive named Barend du

Plessis. De Klerk had risen to
the top of the National Par-
tyâ\200\231s powerful Transvaal or-

tiously mainstream views on
the future of white power. Un- - .
like -du Plessis, who had
worked abroad for I.B.M., de
Klerk had not traveled widely
outside the country, had no
experience of economics and
had never spoken to a black
person as an equal.

- Dawie de Villiers, the Na-
tional Party leader for the
Cape region and a close de
Klerk ally for 20 years, re- -
calls the doubts some har- Congress, the Communist
bored about de Klerk. â\200\234The Party and other villains of
more reform-minded mem- his partyâ\200\231s mythology.
bers of the caucus thought, Sl i

â\200\230Look, we donâ\200\231t know whether
de Klerk, is going to be that

committed to reform. Isn't he
.more of a man-in-the-middle
kind of figure? We need

GORBACHEV GREW UP '

on a collective farm in the

black-earth region of south- :
ern Russia, in a home that 4
lacked running water or elec- :

-and could more safely afford father was a cabinet minis- |

~Someone boldly favoring re- . tricity; but his grandfather

form.â\200\235 We must make sure was chairman of the farm, .

that this engine is not going to ~making him a member of the

come to a stop again.â\200\231â\200\235 . nomenklatura, the governing
:Unlike - Gorbachev, who _class. So was de Klerk, who

established with the old guard _- tensely political family. -His |

â\200\230to_get his reforms off to an

\$ orms an ::'ter, â\200\230hisâ\200\235 great-grandfather â\200\230a -
â\200\230explosive â\200\230start-"On â\200\234Feb. -2,

_Senator, â\200\234an â\200\230uncle â\200\230by â\200\230mar-
.7Tiage - was prime â\200\230minister.
- Both men were marked from

ban on the African National â\200\234:â\200\231imbued early on with a spirit

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of noblesse oblige. Both studied law, and though they were â\200\230more politicians than law-

Riding high, 1990: De Klerk at a Durban hospital after surgery, both men seem to have -

â\200\230been stamped by their legal education with a devotion to a civil society and an aversion to the more militaristic outlook of their predecessors.

All of this helps explain how

such reformers arose from such systems. In de Klerk's case, according to those who know him well, there are at least two other factors that enabled him to move as far as he has.

. One, invariably cited by de

Klerk's admirers, - is -his

- church, an important influence on a people as intensely .

â\200\230religious as the Afrikaners.

He is a member of the Gere-

formeerde Kerk, popularly known as Doppers, the smallest and least hidebound denomination of the Dutch Reformed Church. This sect preaches a deep sense of man's sinfulness and the constant need for improve-

ment; their motto, in fact, is

â\200\234Forever Reforming.â\200\235â\204¢

-. A second important factor

for de Klerk was the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. For the

white regimes in Pretoria, g

â\200\230the Communist threat was not a distant bogymen. Soviet .

- et money and weapons supplied

ported the â\200\234guerrilla war against â\200\230apartheid; Soviet - advised Cuban troops fought - South African soldiers in An-

gola suddenly Gorbachev

removed the threat. The stirrings in Eastern Europe, *

moreover, dramatized for.

de Klerk the futility of trying to contain forever the aspi-

t, triumphal year.

jority. De Klerk's direct debt to Gorbachev is so large that Colin Eglin, a canny leader of South Africa's liberal Democratic Party, declares, The process of real reform in South Africa started somewhere in a dacha outside of Moscow in 1985.

FOR THE FIRST TWO years of his presidency, de Klerk advanced, propelled by the sheer excitement of a journey undertaken at last. The main legal struts of apartheid fell one by one, arousing expectations at

home and intoxicating the outside world. Negotiations

were joined with the opposition about a new, democrat-

ic order. Western business-

men flew in to scout investment opportunities. Foreign leaders who had shunned the white regime embraced de Klerk on state visits.

The new leader displayed a knack for political theater -

,"unknown" because unnecessary among his predecessors. His unannounced visit to Soweto in September

1990 was a triumph. Astonished residents of the black township crowded in to touch him, chanting

Tuyiva de Klerk! and * .#Comrade! ... Comrade! Some delirious members of

de Klerk's party began to

:"dream about = winning enough black votes to re-

_tain â\200\234power â\200\230when all South
Afnmns -, were

â\200\234-Last March,â\200\230 after heâ\200\231 en- -

*countered resistance â\200\234from
rthe old â\200\230guard, he sought and
receded a fresh mfusnon of

rations of a suppressed ma- A (Contmued on page 42)

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(Continued from page 38)

support from his public with a white referendum on his strategy.

It is difficult to say exactly when the euphoria dissipated. Conflict was inevitable the moment the negotiators shifted their attention from the past to the future and from ideology to power, but for a time they glossed over their differences in neat constitutional formulations and joint statements of vague intentions.

Last May the underlying conflicts were laid bare when constitutional talks broke down. De Klerk insisted that the political and economic interests of the white minority, or any minority, be constitutionally protected against the majority. His black rivals, mainly Nelson Mandela's group, the African National Congress, feared this amounted to a white veto. Mandela, worried that he was marching into a compromise his constituents would not support, walked away and de Klerk, still dizzy with the success of his white referendum, let him. A month later the President ventured into Boipatong and discovered that the tremendous reservoir of goodwill he had remarked upon during his visit to Soweto had nearly evaporated.

For de Klerk, the year 1992 ended in a storm of scandals and misadventures, the resignation of fatigued advisers and the defection of former allies. Even the things he did right tended to come out wrong.

He reconciled with Mandela in a meeting given all the diplomatic fanfare of an international summit; but his most important black political ally, Mangosuthu Buthelezi of the Zulu-based Inkatha party, promptly broke off relations in a snit, and began flirting with white right-wingers.

He freed hundreds of imprisoned anti-apartheid guerrillas; but he infuriated the public by also setting loose (as a crude gesture of political balance) a right-wing psychopath who had coolly gunned down black pedestrians. - -

In November a respected judge unearthed : evidence that the previous year, while de Klerk was waltzing Mandela to the tune of the new South Africa, his military intelligence had hired a notori-

ous thug named Ferdi Barnard, a convicted murderer implicated in a catalogue of political assassinations. Barnard drafted an elaborate plan to discredit the A.N.C. using prostitutes and drug dealers. Whether he actually carried out the plan, what else he did and with whose blessing have yet to be established. But the fact that de Klerk had such people on his payroll was enough for the headlines to howl Ferdigate.

Someone in Moscow said of perestroika that the plane has departed, but no one knows whether or where the plane is going to land, Nel says. De Klerk also has this dynamism to get things underway but he wasn't quite sure of where this was going to lead, and unintended consequences have forced him to become more of a crisis manager.

For the first time since he took office, de Klerk has heard rumbles of discontent from within his own party that he is giving away too

much, too fast, giving rise to

an intra-party joke: What do the initials of P. W. Botha and F. W. de Klerk stand for? Past Worries and Future Worries.

For many in his party, de Klerk is now on probation. If the talks stall, members may begin to defect, and if they defect, he could have trouble

getting Parliament to approve the laws he needs to hand over power to an interim government. â\200\234I think if it doesnâ\200\231t end, and end very soon, it could become a whirlwind,â\200\235 says Ebbe Dommissie, the editor of the influential pronationalist newspaper Die Burger. â\200\234There is tremendous discontent.â\200\235

The prospects of an insurrection are probably remote. As David Welsh, a University of Cape Town political scientist, points out, de Klerk has not suffered a single defection from his party caucus or cabinet in the three years of his presidency. One reason is that the party, everyone concedes, has nowhere else to turn. Another is that de Klerk has vowed there will be no further whites-only elections in South Africa, which removes any incentive for disgruntled Nats to reposition themselves against the threat of a right-wing electoral challenge.

But the disaffection in the

National Party reflects a real anxiety among whites, who mutter with increasing alarm about de Klerkâ\200\231s handing over

the country to black Bolsheviks, about the dangers of the country being dismembered by civil war, about South Africa becoming another African banana republic.

When I dropped by the office of the party leader de Villiers in early December, his constituents in the Eastern Cape region were electrified by black terrorist attacks on a predominantly white golf club in King Williamâ\200\231s Town and a restaurant in Queenstown.

â\200\234You go to the Eastern Cape today, after the murders, after Queenstown and the golf club incident, and there really is not a good feeling about the Government,â\200\235 de Villiers says. â\200\234The more this unhappiness grows, people will demand unreasonable things of the Government.â\200\235 If the state gives in to demands

for a crackdown, he says, the negotiating process will end. But if it resists these entreaties, â\200\234People will lose confidence in the politicians and they will run after strong men who promise them a short cut to a peaceful country.â\200\235

DE KLERK'S TROUBLES, like Gorbachevâ\200\231s, are probably inherent in his mission. Such men are reformers, not revolutionaries. They intend to correct what they perceive as mistakes, not to avenge injustices. They seek orderly and gradual change not the sudden upending of the established order.

More than that, they are reformers working from the top; they try, as a Soviet commentator once said of Gorbachev, to be simultaneously Luther and the Pope. Accordingly, they retain a fundamental respect for the past, since that past has made them leaders and given them whatever legitimacy they have.

Penitence is not de Klerkâ\200\231s style. It is true, he told an audience in the Orange Free State town of Winburg in October, that the Nationalists had â\200\234clung on too long to a dream of separate nation-states,â\200\235 a mistake for which â\200\234we are sorry.â\200\235 But the intent was never â\200\234evilâ\200\235 or â\200\234malicious.â\200\235 On the contrary, he said, â\200\234the struggle for justice runs through our history like a golden thread.â\200\235 This does not mean that de Klerk secretly believes in the racial

doctrines of apartheid, only. .
- that he does not believe in

sawing off the branch on which he sits.

For the same reason, de Klerk has been unwilling to

il ship between the two men is

~ theater of a different kind.

confront his security forces, despite abundant evidence that at least some soldiers and police are pursuing their

own reactionary agendas.
The South African leader has
not put up with the kind of
arrant insubordination that
Gorbachev tolerated in the
year leading up to the at-
tempted coup of August 1991
and few believe the opposi-
tion is coherent enough to
threaten de Klerk in that
fashion. But the South Afri-
can leader has, to put it gen-
erously, shown little enthusi-
asm for weeding out the mal-
contents and freelancers en-
gaged in sabotaging his de-
clared policies.

The week before Christ-
mas, de Klerk admitted for
the first time that military
officials had engaged in ille-
gal and/or unauthorized ac-
tivities and malpractices,
possibly including political
assassinations, aimed at sab-
otaging racial reconciliation.
He announced that 23 officers
were being dismissed or sus-
pended. It was an important
step to preserve de Klerk's
credibility as a reformer and
to discourage the rebels with-
in his ranks. But it was a
minimal response, taken un-
der strong pressure from the
AN.C. and performed with
such delicacy (the disciplined
officers are candidates for de
Klerk's new amnesty law and
may even keep their pen-
sions) that it would not shake
the loyalty of the top military
leadership.

He must be very careful
about the security forces,
Domisse said. Suppose ev-
erything collapses, the negoti-
ations process goes out the
window, what then? How does
he rule the country without
the security forces?

NE THING SOUTH

Africa lacks to make
the symmetry com-
plete is a Boris Yel-
tsin, the scorned
Communist who en-
gaged Gorbachev in a
riveting opera of po-
litical courtship, wounded
feelings, rash words, humilia-
tion, revenge and reconcilia-
tion played out again and
again before a rapt public. De
Klerk has no rival within his
own party or his own race

who represents a plausible alternative. Nelson Mandela does not come from within the system, as Yeltsin did, and so the political relation-

There is this striking similarity, however: In Gorbachev's final months,

following the failed coup attempt, Yeltsin realized that however much he despised Gorbachev, he needed the Soviet leader to remain securely in place long enough to finish surrendering power. Mandela, too, has recently taken to bolstering de Klerk with unexpected praise and shrewd concessions, including a vague promise that de Klerk's party will share power for an indefinite period even if it loses elections. The more his other friends abandon him, the more de Klerk needs Mandela. And until Mandela has the keys to the Union Buildings and command of the army, he needs de Klerk.

That is why, though he has stumbled, de Klerk continues toward his goal. In the closing weeks of 1992, he and Mandela agreed that they would try to have elections, the first in which the 30 million black South Africans will participate, before the end of 1993. This will produce a constituent assembly to write a permanent constitution, and an interim government in which de Klerk's role, if any, will be subsidiary; it will not be the final step, but it will be the end of white monopoly rule in South Africa.

" The question is whether, when they reach the new order, Mandela will be kinder to de Klerk than Yeltsin was to Gorbachev; and whether this partnership of black and white will endure beyond the .transition.

Once they win an election, as the polls indicate they will, the A.N.C.'s leaders will be under enormous pressure to begin redressing the grievances of their constituents. If they seem overly solicitous of the white minority, their erstwhile political comrades the Communist Party, the Pan Africanist Congress, rebellious units within the A.N.C. itself will be more than happy to outflank them in the streets.

Gorbachev's fantasy of a new federation, governed by political consensus under the ironclad protection of constitutional checks and balances, was doomed by the fractious nature of his opposition, by the lack of any culture of

compromise and democratic tolerance in his country and by the climate of relentless economic decline. In the long run, it is hard to see why the Klerk's rather similar and equally idealistic dream should fare any better than Gorbachev's. m - - 3

recession, and jtg transition from
apartheid to majority rule has been
ic black-on-black vio-

_ s outh Africaâ\200\231seconomy is mired in deep

Mandela, leader <;f th'e African
ational Congress (ANC), have suffered a
loss of esteem, The most respected man in

MARK PETERS Pon y e
Finding dirt on every hand: The judge
e AR Y NSETIR ag

the country today may be a Jewish appeals
court judge named Richard Goldstone, 54,
The listeners of one South African radio
station recently named him the top news-
maker of 1992, :

For the past 15 months, Goldstone has
headed a five-member judicial commission
probing the causes of political violence, Hig
panel has censured the government and its
security forces, the ANC and the rival,
Zulu-led Inkatha Freedom Party. â\200\234To g
greater or lesser extent, all the major play-
ers in South Africa have di hands,â\200\235
Goldstone says, "In a highly political field,
we are the only nonplayers, Whatever the
facts turn out to be, we make them public
regardless of the consequences.â\200\235

â\202¬ consequences include raised hackles

about everywhere, The commission

i ommittees have issyed 18 re-
ports on violent incidents, Goldstone an-*

Bt

detailing plans to Smear members of the
ANCâ\200\231s military wing with the help of pros-
titutes, homosexuals and a convicted mur-
derer. The government accused Goldstone
i i ments.â\200\235 But the scan-
to dismiss 16 senior
officers and suspend

gest military shake-up in 70 years.
Just so far: When de Klerk picked him
to head the commission in 1991, Goldstone

Malil, a muckraking newspaper that hag
been censured

â\200\235Â»

gamesmanship is to make
e of the new South Africa.
freely acknowledges that

vacuum, and I am conscious of the political
environment,â\200\235 he says. â\200\234But thereâ\200\231s never

N any conscious attempt to be even-
handed in criticism That has never dictat-
ed what we report.â\200\235 For many South Afri-
cans, those reports are one of the few
sources of honest and j ial j
on their government

falters. With pub
Goldstone and his commission could play a
vital role in that delicate process,

" Josepu CoNTRERAS in Cape Town

TOP TO BOTTOM: HANSONâ\200\224PA, BERND SFI'I'NIKâ\200\224ZEMOSERVICE. HERNANDEZ FOR N EWSW
EEK

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chief referee

seven others, the big- |

by the judge for relying on !
sources in its coverage of po- |

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