

**Paul Sephawe**

Facilitator: This is an interview with Paul Sephawu, we are at his place in Polokwane the date is 21 August 2012, interview is done by Brown Maaba. Comrade thanks very much for your time. Please give me your background, where do you come from?

Respondent: Well from a trade union movement I joined SATAWU around 1997 but I joined it from the security sector. I was working as a security guard by then and then I joined SATAWU immediately. I think six months down the line I was then elected as a shop steward because I was ..., it was still the year of the conference because SATAWU was having a conference in 1996, so we joined just after the national conference. So shop stewards were still being elected by then. Then I became a shop steward, later on I became a full time shop steward in the company I worked for Chubb Security.

Facilitator: Why security, how did you end up in security?

Respondent: Initially when I passed Matric I went to Damelin doing a programme dealing with local government because by then members of the ANC Youth League were encouraged to participate in local government structures. So I went to Damelin and studied local government studies. After that I found that it was difficult to find employment, the one that I was able to find quicker was the security job in order to keep going. That was the idea just to say let me get something that will keep me going, try to improve my education and that is how I joined the security sector. I then joined SATAWU based on the fact that I was just coming from the ANC Youth League by then. I decided to join a trade union that is linked to COSATU

Facilitator: So you were a member of the Youth League from home?

Respondent: Yes I was a member of my branch in Mpembe at Molema branch, I was a member there and then when I moved to Jo'burg to do the Damelin course, I was active although not as active as the way I was in Mpembe in Diepkloof.

Facilitator: And then at school you were a member of SASCO at secondary?

Respondent: Yes I'm originally from COSAS, I joined the SRC then COSAS.

Facilitator: How were you introduced to politics at school, how did it happen, you were expected to go to school and suddenly you come back as a politician?

Respondent: Ja when I was at school around standard 8, senior comrade of the ANC Youth League recruited us, those that were vocal on issues affecting us at school. Mind you I'm coming from a rural school so there were a lot of problems affecting us. For instance the thing that really pushed us was that in the early 1990s, I started being more active in the SRC in 1991/2/3 – it was at that time of comradeship, everywhere everyone was active by then. In my hometown there was a lot of ..., you know when politics came to us in rural areas, rural communities were also fighting against witchcraft as well. So I was active in the school from that level, but initially I was recruited by Tshilidzi Ratshitanga and the others. They came, brought us the constitution and talked to all members of COSAS. We joined. Fortunately during the school holidays I used to visit Meadowlands in Soweto, so I used to used to meet with comrades there who would put more energy into me, when I come back I would share with my colleagues here at home and inform how the structures are formed and all that stuff. So that's how I ended up being the chairperson in 1993, I became the chairperson of the COSAS branch in my area.

Facilitator: What work plans did you have beyond matric, did you want to go to university or you wanted to ..?

Respondent: Initially I wanted to go to university unfortunately because I was raised by a single mother, by the time I was supposed to pass matric she vanished/disappeared, we looked for her and could not find her. But due to lack of finances I had to shift my plans, I then went back to my father because they were divorced. I went to him and asked him to assist me with fees. He told me he cannot afford to pay for my education but he can pay for me to go to college, that's how I landed with Damelin. Damelin course was a short term course. He encouraged me to study local government because he noticed that I had an interest in politics. He also knew that most councillors did not have the necessary knowledge. I took it from there and studied for the certificate in local government. I saw this as an opportunity maybe to get into local government. Unfortunately that didn't happen.

Facilitator: You couldn't find a job

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: And you thought about security?

Respondent: Yes my cousin was already in the security sector, he was working for Federated Springbok by then. Then he said come get your grades it's three weeks then you will be looking for a job so that you can pay to further your studies. I agreed and tried. I got into the security industry I was asked the type of hours I wanted to work, I chose the night shift so that people would not see that I'm a security guard, people were going to be surprised how can a politician like me be a security guard. That's how it started. Some of my comrades in Diepkloof would say you are now a general. So it was embarrassing, with all the popularity I had with my

peers, now here I was guarding a street in Jo'burg. Most of my comrades from COSAS were in UJ, some were in Univen, I couldn't do day shift, I chose nightshift. I had no choice. One thing for sure as a security guard I told myself that I will not allow anyone to exploit me, while I'm trying to get the few cents, the exploitation must not happen. That is when I regrouped with a comrade who is a national coordinator today of the cleaning sector in SATAWU, comrade Bembe, we were both guards at the time. We talked and organised ourselves, we needed some power because the treatment was not right. That is when the whole thing of going to T and G came to place because by then SATAWU was called Transport and General Workers Union, the merger had not yet happened, because the merger happened around 2000 when the new SATAWU was born. We joined when it was called Transport and General Workers Union.

Facilitator: You are talking about treatment, that you were not properly treated, how was treatment at the workplace?

Respondent: You see the first place we guarded was a boarding school called Barnado School in Yeoville. So there you find that, as I said I chose the night shift, so you know how Yeoville was at night, no gun, no weapon, we were by ourselves there. When we arrived there there was no guard house, we pushed for it. We were asked why do we need a secure place whereas we are being paid to secure the premises. That was a problem, the second problem was the payment. The payment was very bad, around R800 per month. When the sectoral wage determination of the security guards was introduced, it was increased to R880 for grade D, although I possessed grade C, but I was employed as a grade D. Those were the issues. The treatment by the supervisors. If you are not a coloured .., the company was predominated by coloureds there, if you are not coloured you would be given posts that did not have a guard room. One guy came and told us that he had a fight with a supervisor who insisted to go and guard sand in a truck for the whole night, there is no basis to guard sand. So the treatment was bad in the security industry at the time, no leave, if you don't know your rights you will work *wayawaya* (forever with no leave) with no day off. This changed when the sectoral

wage determination came into place and the union became strong. This is where we started getting two days off etc.

Facilitator: So it was terrible?

Respondent: Ja

Facilitator: Then you became shop steward within 8 months of being there? How did it happen?

Respondent: Yes, you know know because we were the ones who recruited the members, when we called a general meeting they immediately asked for the people who went all over organising them. Fortunately at the time Chubb was guarding most of the bank industries, they had taken over from Gintec and Bayetes??, so they had a national contract with the banks. So it was easy for us to call general meetings. The other post that we had, you see the guys who stand on the road, the sundowns, the guys wearing yellow and green, .Bembe organised them, I organised the sector that I came from the banking and a school. So it was very quick to get people and because they were oppressed. The date on which our wages were paid out was the second week on a Tuesday. So we would pray for the month to end on a Friday so that the following week would be pay day. And if the month ended on a Wednesday it means you had to wait for a Tuesday. So come the Tuesday the company still does not pay you. So we capitalised on that, we realised their fault and capitalised on it. They did not pay us on time. So we organised. Our organising strategy was that let's get the union in order to be paid on a certain date, not a week after month end. This is how we recruited people, people joined for that particular reason, although others understood that the pay was too low, the starting point was that the very same low pay was supposed to be paid on time. The other problem we had was lunch time and tea breaks. People joined for various reasons, lunch time and tea breaks, guard rooms etc. We

informed employees that they must have guard rooms and protective clothes which must be supplied by the company. In those days the company was deducting money for the uniform. After the sectoral determination they were told that employers must give them the uniform free of charge. So this was our mobilising tools/strategies and then people joined in numbers. We managed to get 100% membership, within the first 8 months we pushed for full time shop steward. There was a company which was on strike every month end, Chubb was on strike every month end.

Facilitator: Striking for what?

Respondent: The first strike that I remember was round the payment date – so on Saturday before the Tuesday we had a meeting and said if this thing happens, the night shift staff will go to work and inform the day shift staff if the money was deposited. The money was supposed to appear from Monday at midnight, the night shift staff would know whether the money has been paid out or not. So when we changed shifts we would know whether the money has been deposited or not, if it is not deposited the shift must not knock off so that when we come in we take them on. So that was the first strike. All the directors were there and we could inform them that people were not paid they would have to beg us to go back to the site. This made us popular because we would insist that they pay us before we go back to the post and the clients were also assisting us by putting pressure on the company. So the money was paid in by the company before midnight. Cash was going up and down, people trying to sort out the strike. That was the first victory that we tested with first. With our unity we were able to push the company and get the results on time. So members started having more and more confidence on us after that. We indicated at the time that if the same thing happens the following month we will do the same thing, we will go on strike

Facilitator: and it never happened again?

Respondent: The following month the company respected us ..., when we were elected the company didn't want to recognise us by then but through the strike they started recognising us to say that okay fine we will communicate with you guys. They were just not prepared to give us time off to go to meetings and all that stuff until we had another strike for our recognition. But we were managing it in a manner that ..., we didn't take the member out on strike based on the collective agreement, we waited for tea break and all that stuff and pushed it as if it's lunch and tea break strike. We asked the company to recognise recognition of 2 shop stewards. We put it on the table that if they resolve that issue, they must also resolve the matter but the head of Chubb realised that they might lose a lot, they accepted and recognised shop stewards and we took it from there. We were now able to go and represent members even in disciplinary hearings. The company would consult with us on all matters.

Facilitator: Did you receive some training as a shop steward?

Respondent: Yes T and G was having training, immediately when we were elected, the organiser by then there was a guy called ..., he was our organiser and he ended up being our HR, Vusi Shabangu. He was a union organiser at the time Bayete bought Gintems, he then became a HR of the company and then subsequently to Chubb. So immediately after you are elected the union will explain to you what is expected of you. They ran introduction workshops, but after that they would take us to Ditsela for workshops on disciplinary procedure, grievance procedures, and as time went on we were taught negotiation skills, labour relations etc.

Facilitator: Was the issue of safety ever addressed because you worked in Yeoville, a dangerous place and other people worked in dangerous sports as well, securities. Were you ever supplied with guns eventually?

Respondent: No and that side, you see in the security industry not all guards work with guns. It is not determined by the environment, the client determines whether they want you to have a gun or not. You can work in a very dangerous area, but if the client says they want an ordinary guard, then you won't have a gun.

Facilitator: Okay but still as a security you felt it was okay?

Respondent: No you would feel that you are supposed to be provided with more equipment like a gun and stuff like that, but based on the poverty, people needed the money, they needed the job, so we would say it's okay it's fine as long as I'm covered, the only thing that guards had was a panic button to call the armed response should something happen to you. But your safety as a security officer the employers did not care about. They cared about their property which we were guarding

Facilitator: Any other benefits that you guys had at Chubb, did you have benefits at Chubb?

Respondent: By then the only benefit that was there ..., the benefits were introduced in 1999 with the provident fund, before that there was no other benefit, nothing. It was only ..., you were only paid a monthly salary about R880 per month plus night shift allowance, as I said I wanted to work the night shift, and that's all. No transport, the pick up point will happen when you are being transported from town, let's say they want to send you to Yeoville, they will pick you up from town, but from Soweto where I was staying you had to find your way into the city. Even when you knock off they can only pick you up at Yeoville and drop you at the office. Our offices were at 132 Fox Street.

Facilitator: But did they finally sign the recognition agreement?



Respondent: Yes we were the first company to have a very progressive collective agreement with many full time shop stewards because we were militant. So we even managed to have full time shop steward. The following year after I joined I was a full time shop steward working in the office of Chubb, dealing with representing workers at the workplace, if I am not assisting workers with their problems I would go to the union office to do other work, if there's training I would go for training.

Facilitator: Were the employers happy with you guys who started the union here ... , there were strikes, demands about a,b,c, etc.?

Respondent: They were not happy because the environment allowed us to push for our rights and members had a lot of confidence in us. They tried to suspend some of us, charge us and so on but members supported us ..., you know at the time we were still new and did not take the law into consideration, we applied militancy, if you are charged workers would wake up in the morning and go and march in the offices and the company would withdraw the charges. The last charges that I still remember was 2000 for embarking on a strike, the collective agreement was not yet signed but we already had full time shop steward. The company was saying we cannot regulate these people without having a signed document and the document that they were coming up with was not in our favour, so we didn't want to sign it at the time. They said we are the ones that incite members to go on strike and all that. So the company was pushing for our dismissal, unfortunately they could not do much, we had the support of all the workers. We assisted workers with their grievances, pay queries etc., because in the security industry the one thing you cannot avoid is the pay queries, employers would simply forget to pay the salaries, little as they were, they would say they forgot, sometimes they would give excuses and say they were not sure where one was posted. So you still had to enquire about your pay. What they did also is if you are 100 they knew that 50 will query if you don't query you would query for the whole year, they knew some of the employees who would not query. And in the security industry they know that if they can take

R20 someone may just overlook it because he will be taken from pillar to post, the effort was not worth it. They would want some excuse to destroy an interest to get the R20. Imagine if the company takes R20 from 15 000 employees, it's a lot of money. So that's how the security industry employers make money.

Facilitator: they rob you?

Respondent: yes day in day out. Besides the little that they are paying, the one that they're supposed to give to you they would manage to get something out of it, either they penalise you and say you were not wearing uniform on a certain day they deduct the whole day's salary. They would find ways to cut the pay. That day in the clients database you've been paid but the employer didn't pay you. The employer will get an amount of for instance R10 000 per month from the client, you will be paid R1500 or R2000

Facilitator: Did the coloured workers join T and G? You talked about coloured workers, that T and G was full of coloured workers?

Respondent: Yes the coloureds joined, as soon as they realised our value they became part of the union, that's why we were 100% in that company with union membership.

Facilitator: How long were you there as a shop steward?

Respondent: I was there until 2007

Facilitator: Quite a long time?

Respondent: yes because by the time Chubb .., we were on the strike, the longest strike in the security industry, I was still at Chubb by then, but Chubb ..(unclear) company to Fedility Springbok. Do you remember the 2006 violent strike, I was the national chairperson of the security sector of SATAWU by then

Facilitator: so you had left your post of being a shop steward to be the national ..?

Respondent: No no, in order to be an office bearer of SATAWU you need to be a shop steward, I was till a shop steward of Chubb, full time, but in the union ranks I was the national chairperson then

Facilitator: How did you rise through the ranks?

Respondent: From the onset after the conference when they came back I was elected as the local chairperson of the security sector. When we met as the Gauteng region I was elected the chairperson of the region. When we went for the merger conference with SATAWU I went there as the Gauteng chairperson of southern Gauteng, chairperson of the security sector and I worked there, I remained in that position until 2005. I 2005 when comrade Jackson who was the national co-ordinator, he was employed as a co-ordinator of SATAWU then I became the national chairperson. There was a national meeting, I was elected in that national meeting to become the national chairperson of the security sector. So because I was the chairperson, being part of the national sector council of the security, the ones that negotiate the salaries of the security guards across the country. I then became the chairperson, unfortunately/fortunately when I became the chairperson there was a dispute that came through the negotiations in the industry, then the strike came to be. It was a national strike led by SATAWU because we as SATAWU, when the other unions, the wage agreement we realised that the new wage agreement is not what we wanted, is not what our members mandated us to do.

We then decided to declare a dispute alone without the other unions within the industry. We took the employers on alone. So it was one of the heaviest tasks I came across. We were infiltrated by employers, impimpis, sometimes those unions would plant their people in order to destroy the noble cause that SATAWU was pushing for, it then ended up in a bloody strike that I do not want to think about. It was difficult and painful. At the time I was still a young man, very violent sector at the time.

Facilitator: After that you came here after 2007?

Respondent: Yes after 2007, after the strike actually, as an employee of Chubb, when the 2006 strike ended, Chubb decided to sell the company to Springbok and you know Springbok is the main employer in the security industry. They have plus/minus 32 000 security guards on the ground other than their spies, so they are the biggest. So by the time I was the chairperson taking the march to Fidelity, the company is selling, when the strike ended my new employer is the one we had marched to. So the employer told me and told me that you are now working for us, you are one of our employees. At Fidelity everything is wrong there, the company is big but they have a lot of problems, uniform, pay queries and all that stuff. At Chubb we managed to come up with a system. As shop steward we were able to say come Tuesday after month end we will be dealing with queries together with employers. So if a member has a problem, pay problem he knows that the shop steward will address it in any way. So the employer was trying not to cause problems any longer, but now here we are we have joined Fidelity with its own culture, it's own problems. We are new, with our position as full time shop stewards we don't know who to report to. Everything was kayos. At the same time it was still tense because we've just been to a strike and the employer called us and told us that you were making noise, telling the whole country how bad we are and all that, how are we going to work together. We said we will try by all means to raise issues so that the company can address it. But Fidelity as it is not prepared to change a lot of its style of operation. We tried and even arranged a march afterwards ..., they were able to destabilise us, they were very good.

We arranged a march and called a meeting asking to settle the matter. At the eleventh hour, the day before the march, everybody was ready for the march, we had to call it off because we couldn't negotiate while we are marching. They said the same day let's sort it out, but the next three months again the same issues would arise. I realised that I cannot be the national chairperson whereas I work for a company which is the worst exploiting company in the industry. I started telling my comrades in my circle to say while I'm still popular I could not continue. The company was not doing what is expected nationally. Now that I work for the company as the national chairperson everybody was raising questions about the problems. The company was not prepared to come to the table. When we do meet it will be addressed this week, the following month they arise somewhere else. I then decided to resign and join SATAWU formerly. So a position was open in Limpopo, they wanted an organiser in Phalaborwa and I felt that I played my part as a worker/leader, I pushed the industry to where it is, now people have provident fund and better salaries although it's not what we expected, we wanted the lowest earning security officer to earn at least R4000/R5000, we could not achieve that because when we raised that people were saying how on earth would you want 100 and something percent increase, we wanted the industry to be adjusted, these people were guarding millions of rands and assets but they were paid too little. I then joined SATAWU as an official in Phalaborwa in 2007, I started in May 2007

Facilitator: As an organiser, what were the challenges of organising in Phalaborwa, you are from Joburg now, in Phalaborwa I'm sure the set up is different?

Respondent: Ja, the challenge, one of the challenges was the vastness of the area, you won't find members like in Gauteng, in Gauteng are just around you, you will walk around and get them. But in Phalaborwa the local start from Phalaborwa up to Makado

Facilitator: It's huge

Respondent: It's about 150/200 kms to drive. You will find that for a disciplinary hearing of a shop steward in Makado, I drive down there, when I come back the whole day is gone, I only represented one member. So I decided that if I go to an area I will represent a member and organise members in that area. If I have a disciplinary hearing in Makado I would create something there for the union to be visible, I will make sure people know I'm in the area. Language was not a problem because I'm originally from here, the language is the same, I speak my own language I'm at home, I don't have to struggle with Isizulu or IsiXhosa, I'm not talking my home language. I worked there 2007, in early 2008 there was a project that our national head office had with our international counterparts, EUNI of organisation. UNI wanted an organiser that would push membership especially at group 4 security, so head office called me back to come and head the organising project for us. The terrain here was foreign to me, I had not worked in Limpopo before so I quickly accepted and went back to Jo'burg again in 2008/2009. I worked on the project because UNI our international union had an agreement, a global agreement with Group 4 security so they wanted us to organise security in Chif?? So I went to work at Group 4. 2010 members here, nominated me while I was working on the project in Gauteng, they wanted me to be the provincial secretary, it was the time of congress in Limpopo. So head office checked with me and asked me if I wanted to work as the provincial secretary there, I said if members want me back I accepted. So I came back during the congress. Then members elected me to be the provincial secretary. That's how I landed here.

Facilitator: What a journey. Lastly what has been the challenges of being a provincial secretary, what were you faced with here?

Respondent: We are faced with .., when I first arrived here there was the demarcation of the provinces. Pretoria was part of here, with almost 10 000 members and when we re-demarcate SATAWU, Pretoria had to go back to Gauteng, then the membership dropped. The second challenge, the employers in Limpopo are not transformed like the ones in Gauteng, now on the provincial

landscape to look at an employer at Mtetema, to look at an employer in Phalaborwa, we still had employers that did not respect the rights of the workers. Those are the challenges and some of the challenges just followed me, the security challenges, they are back on my doorstep again because the provident fund that we have established has its own challenges and members in the security industry said when we elect this man we thought that from a national chairperson we will be understanding this thing – especially for us in Limpopo. The other challenge was now I was dealing with the entire transport union now, a new challenge, I had a new scope where I didn't have a specific sector to work with or talk about. I had to talk about aviation, passenger act, I had to learn a lot. As a provincial secretary people elect you today and expect you to know things tomorrow morning to say that at Aviation we have 1,2, 3 problems, they expect you to be at that level. So those are the challenges and the politics of Limpopo. Here you are either for or against. Whatever you do here you will be perceived to be either for or against. If you say something now they will say "we knew, we saw that when he came that is he for or against". The other thing when I arrived, other political comrades were like "why did you elect someone from Johannesburg, this man was brought up here but he does not understand us" I heard that so many times during the conference. I drove from Gauteng early in the morning because the project had not yet ended and I could not say I am leaving the project whereas I'm not yet elected. So those are the challenges that I faced .., all sectors reporting to me expected me to be understanding them. When they say there's a derailment at Spoornet now, I must understand what derailment means, what happened. So the challenge of being a chairperson. Also to manage new people is difficult, I found organisers here and some of the organisers would say he is newly employed .., the man has been employed in 2007 how on earth can he find us here being organisers for so long and become the provincial secretary

Facilitator: and overtake us

Respondent: So I was elected in a very short space of time as the provincial secretary, employed in 2007, in 2010 I am now a provincial secretary, this raised

issues for me, from all corners people were questioning this. People would say the constitution should have stated that you should have served so many years before you can be a provincial secretary and all that. But here I am.

Facilitator: Did you manage with all those problems?

Respondent: Yes membership increased, the only thing that I tried to do is to allow the official to come and tell me what was expected of me, I called the executive of the trade union to say guys it's fine I'm a new man but I'm not new in the union I've been in the union for so long, yes of course as an employee of the union I'm new but please take the experience that I had in the security industry, in the union because I had been in the sectoral executive committee of the union for so long, maybe from 2000 I was already and EC member. I was not as new as people were saying in the conference. I am new in the employment of the union, so allow me to learn more, please give me space and let's work together. So the comrades were supportive to be honest. Unfortunately when you elected ..., you still had to marshall your forces to the national conference, we were just coming from the national conference. I should go and nominate comrades, as a provincial secretary I must guide the province to say you are not nominating this one, you are nominating that one and that also created another tension for me. People would say "you see this young man .."

Facilitator: We told you

Respondent: He wants to give the vote to a particular person on behalf of the province. But after the national congress I called a bosberaad to say let's heal, let's try to settle our scores, where we faulted let's try to move on. But after the bosberaad came the COSATU congress last week and it was contested in two different ways, if you contest it in an organisation perspective someone perceived it as if you are pushing a political agenda, maybe you saw yesterday's Sowetan ...



people shifted the whole ordinary workers parliament into a political arena towards Mangaung to say Zuma's group managed to consolidate. So in the two set ups we found ourselves again in another against or for. So we cannot say .., the only thing is that things are coming alright, the organisation is growing, membership is growing, we have just opened another local after we were elected, we increased membership in Lephalale, I employed a new organiser, a new administrator, we created an office there. Since I came in all offices of SATAWU I managed to push for their furniture, so the structures are stable. I'm proud to say things are where they are supposed to be.

Facilitator: Have you guys as SATAWU being affected by the labour brokers issue?

Respondent: As SATAWU we are, we are one of the heaviest, labour broking affect us in the security sector, in the cleaning sector, now it's making it's way into transport especially the road freight sector although now the last agreement in the road freight tries to minimise it to say if the company got so many workers as labour brokers they must to ensure that the following year it must reduce until it comes to an end. We are affected by labour broking especially in the security industry, although in the security industry we won't directly say it's labour broking but it is labour broking because someone looks for contract work in the municipality, the workers work for him, he gets paid by the municipality. Some companies even take it worse. They don't employ group 4, we stopped them from doing that. It's a private security but they use labour brokers to get them employees. We said how do you then extend the scope, the scope is already is open, the man is working at the municipality but he's not working for the municipality he's working for Group 4, why do you extend it again so that he is working for someone else, he is no longer working for group 4 and group 4 is also not working for them is working for municipality. So we managed to win that one. Even in the cleaning sector, actually our sectors are problematic, the work is being outsourced and it's a problem.

Facilitator: Any closing word maybe?

Respondent: One thing that I should also mention even with this administration in Limpopo, it has hit us heavily in the security industry and cleaning because you find some employers are failing to pay the wages to the .., when you push them they say the department didn't pay us, when you phone the head of the department from a political perspective, let's say you phone the MEC of education, the MEC will say I will try to do something but it is no longer in my control, I cannot give instruction that you get paid. The contractor got paid. So it's affecting us especially on cleaning and security, it also affected us also in the aviation, the airport, the airport relied on the grant from the transport department, when we were negotiating this year they could not move beyond 8% because they said the department says they don't have money because of this administration. So we were affected badly. I want to thank you for listening to my story.

Facilitator: that was wonderful, thanks

Respondent: Thanks for your time broer.

END

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