

WORKERS SOLIDARITY

January / February 2011

Twenty-Seven Years of Irish Anarchist News

Change Won't Come From the Ballot Box

Fintan O'Toole appears to want us to be listened to as citizens and believes that political reform is crucial. It is a natural reaction after witnessing the cronyism of Fianna Fáil in power over the last 13 years and how they've acted in favour of the ruling elite. The fact that I, as a taxpayer on €40,000 p.a., will pay exactly the same amount of tax as one on €300,000 p.a. puts that sharply into focus.

Dermot Freeman

This is how Fianna Fáil runs tackle for IBEC, the tax dodgers of the golden circle and the IMF when it comes to protecting the interests of the bondholders. Let's not forget that this is a political party that kissed goodbye to our natural resources for no good apparent reason. Thus there went €540 billion in the Corrib gas field that we could dearly use now. I can empathise with everyone who wishes to see an end to this regime. But political reform is won through struggle. It is not signed for in an on-line petition. It is not born out of necessity; it is born from acting in solidarity.

The 'left block' had a platform and speeches at the ICTU protest on November 29th last where, as well as advocating more protests and a general strike, we were subjected to talk of the election and the 'opportunity it pre-



sented' in voting for candidates from the United Left Alliance. As an anarchist I find it impossible to see how my life and the conditions we find ourselves in, or the prospects which face us, are improved by the fact that Joe Higgins or Richard Boyd Barrett are in the Dáil arguing against the policy which is being implemented by the Government.

This election will be another carnival. It is a spectator sport. The candidates take to the field and we get to choose who sits in the big house, and it can be entertaining. It will be pleasing if it proves to pass that we see Fianna Fáil spectacularly fall into oblivion, but it will not change our objective circumstances. Whatever

Government comes into power will effectively be like the receiver appointed to wind up a company and ensure that the creditors get paid. They will appear to be powerless in the face of the IMF technocrats and the European Central Bank. It is not in the job description of any government to change the rules of this game.

How do we see change coming about? We bring about real change by becoming ungovernable. Not by choosing a new government and hoping for the best. Democracy is not the X-factor. It is making sure that decisions are made in the interests of the many, and not for the few. Democracy is about that, or it is not democracy.



Shell to Sea

The new film 'The Pipe' examines the Corrib Gas Project



Tunisia

People power overthrows dictatorship and sets an example for the region.



Wikileaks

Imperialism continues to be embarrassed by leaks. But what is the media spinning?

People Power in Tunisia



On Saturday December 18th last, the Tunisian police stopped Mohamed Bouaziz, an unemployed university graduate, and seized the hand cart of fruit and vegetables he had been selling to support himself and his family. Enraged by the injustice and despairing of any escape from destitution and starvation in Tunisia's impoverished economy, increasingly ravaged by rising food prices, the young man set fire to himself in protest outside the town hall in Sidi Bouzid, 200km south-west of the capital Tunis. The young man was later to die in hospital.

Paul Bowman

Angered by the incident, several hundred local youth, equally suffering from unemployment and repression from the police, gathered to protest the incident and Tunisia's corrupt presidential regime. Local police responded with tear gas and violence. Since that time, and until the time of writing, just following the fleeing of ex-President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, mass rioting and violent clashes with the police have swept the country. Death tolls are disputed but, for example, in Kesserine, an inland town, far from the tourist industry of the coastal region, the death toll estimated by local doctors and hospital staff exceeded 50 over the last weekend of December alone.

But the savagery of the virtual civil war that broke out between the people of Tunisia, from unemployed youth, school and university students, trade unionists, artists, intellectuals and even lawyers, against the corrupt cabal around the dictator in all but name, Ben Ali, may as well have

not been happening for the first three weeks as far as the TV news schedules of RTE, the BBC or the rest of Western media were concerned. Commentators at Al Jazeera and other Arab language media bitterly pointed out the hypocrisy of a Western media that splashed the Iranian Green movement's resistance to Ahmedinejad's stealing of the last elections all over the nightly TV broadcasts, but censored the biggest story in the Arab world for three weeks, until forced to do so as the disturbances reached Tunis and tourist areas. Could this be because the Ben Ali regime is a "friend of the West"? The wall of silence imposed by our "fearlessly independent and even-handed" media speaks volumes.

Meanwhile in the Arab world, from Egypt to Syria, ordinary watchers and bloggers bristled with enthusiasm for what they called the Tunisian Intifada. The experience of being squeezed between corrupt, dictatorial and repressive regimes and rising food prices is common to most people in the region. Even though the Tunisian government closed opposition newspapers and arrested and tortured journalists who dared cover the struggle, coverage still came out through Twitter, although Facebook fell over itself to help the Ben Ali regime (and its CIA backers) by taking down the pages of any journalists or ordinary Tunisians covering the story.

Eventually four weeks of struggle deposed Ben Ali but with the army now in charge the future remains uncertain. However the Tunisian people have learned that they have the power to overthrow even a long-entrenched dictatorship and so can also do so with a new, less stable regime.

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Shell to Sea
Campaign to move Shell's gas pipeline offshore from Co. Mayo.
<http://www.shelltosea.com>

Hands Off the People of Iran
Anti-imperialist network for solidarity with Iranian trade unionists & the women's rights movement.
<http://www.hopoi.org>

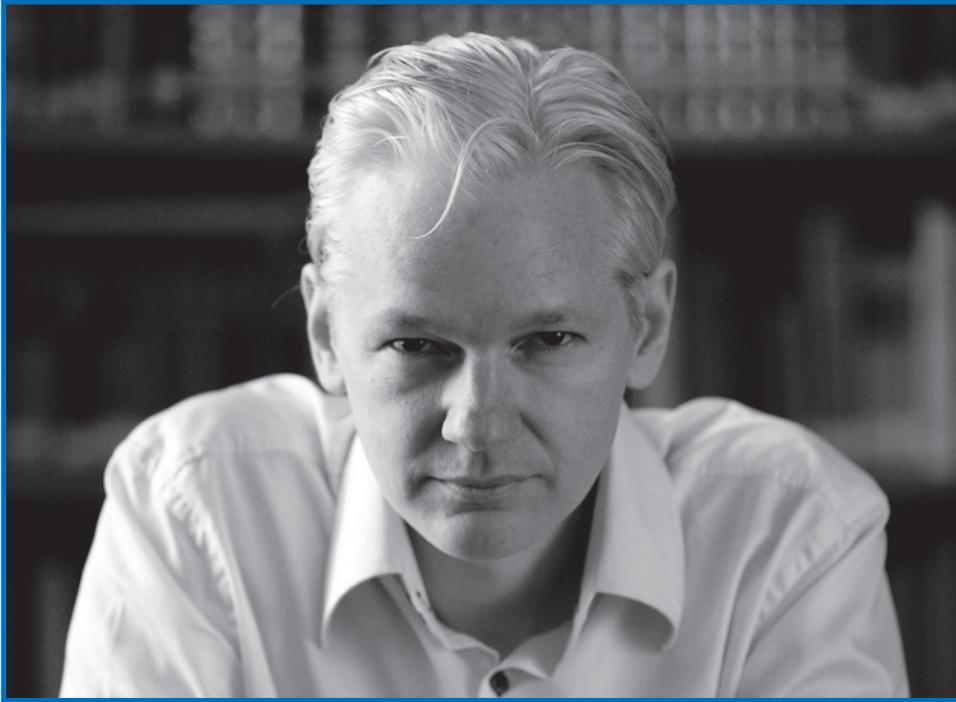
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Wikileaks: Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?



Wikileaks continues to make almost daily headlines. Aside from the various revelations, there are also two widely told stories that are supposed to help us put these leaks into context.

Gavin Gleeson

The first story is that the leaks are nothing more than gossip. They are stories about Gaddafi's nurse and what an ambassador thinks of David Cameron. Anyone who isn't a tabloid reader or nosey-parker should be disinterested in the content.

The other story is that the world is soon going to be brought inexorably towards conflict, possibly even World War III because of the terrorist activities of Julian Assange. In this narrative we have the kingpin of the world's most powerful information terrorist organisation running roughshod over the US

and its allies.

Both of these stories, while almost entirely contradictory, have at least two things in common. They're both convenient for the US establishment and they're both complete rubbish.

The revelations of the cables are in fact extremely important and amazingly far-reaching. In Spain we see the US used its state power to engage in industrial corruption and espionage. They additionally dictated what laws should be passed, in this case Spain's copyright law. The leaks detail the US successfully forcing European democracies to engage in illegal cover-ups of criminal activity, such as kidnapping, torture and murder; a fact which is detailed clearly in the cables with Spain and Germany. We now know that the US spies not only on its enemies, but also on its allies. In the case of Sweden, leaks show "informal cooperation" of se-

curity services intended explicitly to avoid democratic oversight; a measure that the US ambassador deemed would be necessary as it was probably "unconstitutional" and might cease if the Swedish parliament noticed.

Such revelations might not be surprising to people who tend towards the conspiratorial. However, now we have proof that the US acts very cynically and completely without regard to the law and with a complete disdain for jurisprudence or democracy.

A state, which functions with such haughty contempt for democracy and justice, can hardly be deemed anything but a rogue state. Which brings us to the second narrative. The mission statement of WikiLeaks reveals that they hope to provide an atmosphere in which society can function without being overwhelmed with corruption, conspiracy, exploitation and oppression. These cables at least put into the public domain current instances of the above.

Calling the leak an act of terrorism really calls into question what the word terrorism can possibly mean. Does it mean perverting justice, or revealing such perversion? Is it murdering and torturing the innocent, or the disclosure of those crimes? Is it attempts to bypass democracy entirely, or making conspiracies to do so plain?

When the rhetoric is removed and the facts made available, hopefully it will be obvious who is on the side of justice and who is not.



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Government Attacks on Healthcare

As the health budget is cut, a worsening health service will predictably result in higher national morbidity and mortality. Are we prepared to allow this to occur?

Ryan Barrett

While the current coven of ministers prepare to vacate their comfy chairs in Leinster house, one in particular seems to have no sense of shame, Mary Harney, who was recently quoted as having no regrets for her actions during her tenure despite the litany of bad choices and u-turns made by her over the years. The announcement of the now infamous “Four Year Plan” serves to confirm the worst fears that devastating changes are to be implemented in the HSE.

What will this mean for the overstretched health service? It is not difficult to imagine a general and rapid stagnation of the services. The reduction of frontline staff – nurses, doctors, healthcare assistants, porters and allied healthcare workers – will undoubtedly impact massively on service users/patients. The number of ill patients stuck on trolleys has risen and will increase further as planned bed closures continue. The current amount of closed beds around the country stands at over 1500.



Government and HSE rhetoric has led us to believe that we have a health service that is modelled on “Centres of Excellence”. The reality for patients and families is far from an experience of excellence as was recently highlighted by the case of a patient with advanced cancer who spent 25 hours on an A&E trolley awaiting treatment, despite having high level private health insurance. This reality will become the norm for more and more patients, particularly those who do not have the privilege of health insurance.

Frontline staff that are already working in dangerous conditions nationwide due to increased workload and reduced resources are now facing even further draconian measures. Not satisfied with the long running moratorium, the government want to remove a further 13,000 public sector jobs, many of which will be cut from the health services. We can expect more suffering in the years to come for individuals and their families as the general health of our society worsens.

A little plug for our comrades over at irishanarchism.org who have produced these stickers for distribution, leave a reply on their website if you would like to get your hands on some.



Thinking About Anarchism: Can Ireland Go it Alone?

As the scale of the debts loaded onto the Irish people became clear, the calls for defaulting became louder. The moral argument for default is certainly strong: why should Irish workers pay for the poor decisions of Irish and European capitalists? But justified though it may be, would defaulting cause more pain than gain?

James O'Brien

The counter-argument, which has been a constant refrain from the government since the crisis began, is that if Ireland doesn't assume the debts of the banks, then international credit will dry up and we'll be unable to finance our state-run essential services.

Lenihan's argument makes one thing obvious: Ireland is enmeshed in a global economic system that leaves precious little room for manoeuvre. Of course, with the arrival of the EU Commission and the IMF to directly oversee operations here, nobody even bothers to say that Ireland is a sovereign country anymore.

What does this mean for alternatives?

One option would be to place Irish industry under public control. However, the current owners of this capital would try to withdraw it and shift it overseas. This in itself could lead to economic collapse.

It should be clear to everyone that a small country like Ireland cannot operate in economic isolation. It was hard enough for a large one like the USSR to do so and it's simply impossible for Ireland to survive unless it's our ambition to become a latter day version of North Korea.

Irish nationalist projects are therefore a

waste of time. There is no point in fighting to return to being a minor player in the capitalist system, especially as it's only an illusion of sovereignty.

The economic crisis is an international one and as such it can only be solved internationally. The only question is whether that solution is going to be a capitalist one or a socialist one. At the moment, despite the severe dent to the credibility of neo-liberalism, and indeed capitalism itself, it remains the dominant ideology amongst the population at large.

Indeed its dominance reaches so deep that most people aren't even aware that they support it. There are lots of complex reasons for this dominance, but one that can't be avoided by the left is the lack of a viable alternative.

The Soviet Union versus Socialism

Mention socialism and most people think of the USSR and immediately associate the concept with failure. With the absence of a vibrant labour movement advancing the idea that socialism is possible, most people fall back on the ideology pervading society.

It is up to the left to respond to the crisis and advance plausible socialist solutions. A keystone of any viable alternative to capitalism is going to be its internationalism.

Just over a month ago there were major strikes in France and, as the crisis gets worse, they could easily break out again. It is almost impossible to know what could spark a renewal of the struggle there, but given the fragility of the European financial system an Irish default – if it was on the basis of rejecting domination by capital itself – could well serve as the inspiration.

It is in this context and with our eyes firmly oriented towards developing international



solutions that a default would make sense. Otherwise Lenihan is right. The difference is that the government and the main opposition parties only think within a capitalist mental framework. It's time to broaden our horizons.

The wealth that capitalists own isn't so much the Euros they have in the bank, but their control of the production process that generates those very Euros. And that control depends on dominating workers and getting them to produce commodities for the capitalists to sell on a profit.

So capitalists withdrawing their wealth and moving it overseas is only a problem if they can take the production process itself away. Currently they have that ability, but it's not a law of nature that they always will. If enough countries moved towards a socialist society and put businesses under public control then capitalists wouldn't find it so easy to move overseas and at the very least we'd be able to produce enough ourselves to maintain our society.

Realistically, Ireland must unite with Eu-

rope if it is to avoid a pillaging. This means something different than the EU, given its current role as an agent of European capitalism rather than as a representative of the interests of the people of Europe. But the takeover by the EU of the Irish finances has the advantage of focussing our attention away from the charade at Leinster House and gets us thinking on a bigger scale. There is zero point in trying to go back to a pre-EU era of Irish independence, which after all was only ever a disguise for us being an adjunct of the UK.

Only large countries have a chance of maintaining genuine sovereignty in the face of the power of the financial markets. And if any country is to be democratic it's going to have to be socialist. Unless we wish to remain supine before the wealthy elite, we're going to have ditch primitive notions of national independence, embrace the idea that democracy is only meaningful if there is economic equality and be ambitious enough to try these radical ideas on an international scale.



While the budget increased take home pay for those earning over €1m p.a. at the same time low paid workers will suffer a cut of up to 11% in income.

Retired Anglo-Irish banker Eugene Sheehy, who has a pension of €550,000 per year, got a rise of €16,000 due to Budget 2011. Anglo-Irish boss Sean Fitzpatrick gained over €100,000. At the same time a public sector pensioner on €15,000 suffered a loss of €580, and a private sector pensioner on €15,000 sees a loss of €400.

Stamp duty on houses valued at over €1 million has been slashed. Instead of paying 9% tax, it will fall to 2%

www.anarchistblackcat.org



A friendly and respectful online discussion board for anarchists of all stripes and those just interested in seeing what anarchists think.

Anarchism & the WSM

The end of last year proved to be a busy period for the WSM as the IMF/ECB road show arrived in town. We were active in organising a 'left block' within the ICTU protest against the governments 4-year plan held on 27th November. We marched in that block as part of the 1% network, an anti-capitalist coalition of socialist organisations that we are part of. The same network gathered at the Wolfe Tone statue at Stephens Green to join with another 'left block' protest at the Dail on budget night. In Cork, our branch was involved in organising a further protest against the budget on the following evening and our members there were involved in a Social Welfare Defenders protest and occupation of Anglo-Irish Bank.

Elsewhere on the streets, WSM members were involved in student protests at the Department of Finance in Dublin, in Cork and in Maynooth, while we also supported the anti-Garda brutality march in Dublin following the deployment of riot police and subsequent beatings of students at the afore-mentioned protest in Dublin. We attended the community sectors "Spectacle of Defiance and Hope" held in Dublin city centre on the Friday following the budget. Finally, our members were present at the Feminist Open Forum rally at



the GPO on December 18th calling for abortion legislation in line with the X case following the European Court of Human Rights decision against the Irish state in the ABC case.

While street activity is important, we are also fully aware of the importance of education and political discussion. With this in mind, we staged our fifth "Rethinking Revolution"

meeting in Seomra Spraoi in Dublin titled "The Republican Tradition - A Place to Build From?" which gave an anarchist perspective on Republicanism in Ireland over the last 200 years or so. In Cork we hosted the latest in the Winter Talks series in Solidarity Books with speakers on the Land War and famed anarchist, Piotr Kropotkin. Our members also participated in the "Claiming our Future" conference in the RDS in Dublin where almost 1,000 people gathered to discuss ways of combating the cuts and constructing an alternative Ireland.

Street protests and radicalisation of the populace are no good in and of themselves and at our National Conference, held in Cork in November, we discussed a number of possible ways forward for the WSM. However, whatever strategy is employed, if we are to have any chance of successfully resisting the ongoing attack on our living conditions, we need to be organised. This can be as part a specific political organisation, like the WSM, or in trade unions, community organisations and campaigning groups, where many of our members are also active. If this sounds like a necessity to you or if you would like to find out more about our work, or us, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

For further written, audio and video reports on the above, see our website: www.wsm.ie

Review: *The Pipe*

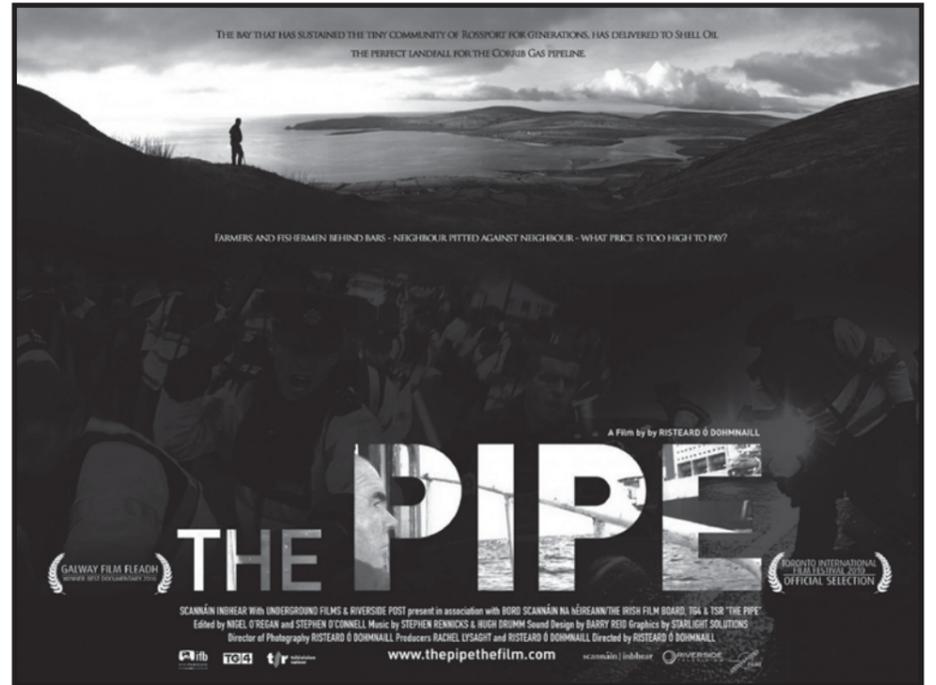
This film brings to the big screen the dramatic story of Shell's blundering, sometimes violent, attempts to impose a high-pressure raw gas pipeline on a small North Mayo community. The documentary features footage taken over three years, from 2006 to 2008, by Risteard O'Domhnaill. It has all the ingredients, stunning landscapes, riveting action scenes and the real-life stories of local people who found themselves on the front line of the drama. The film is short on background to the whole issue and mentions very little on the actual dangers posed by the pipeline and refinery, as well as the giveaway terms the oil companies 'extracted' from Irish state. However, in Willie Corduff, and particularly in Pat O'Donnell, the filmmaker has struck cinema gold. Through the words and, especially, the actions of these figures we get a good picture of just what's at stake here and what it takes to engage in effective resistance.

Eugene Walsh

Divisions inside the campaign, espe-

cially in 2007, are also covered. There's dramatic footage of shouting matches at campaign organising meetings. In these scenes, prominent activist Maura Harrington is painted as angry and belligerent but there seems to be a greater focus on getting some good movie drama than on giving us any explanation of the issues behind these arguments. In fact, the real story here is perhaps that of a community managing to stick together in the face of extreme pressures and frequent violence at the hands of an oil giant, its private security thugs and its close allies among the forces of the state - the guards, the navy (!), the courts and prisons.

Divisions in the campaign stemmed for the most part from a period of high tension in October and November 2006. In fact, the most remarkable footage taken by O'Domhnaill comes from a protest, a 'day of action' held at this time, when Gardai baton charged the assembled crowd, images which made national news at the time, leading possibly to more public scrutiny of the State and Shells violent tactics. A follow-up demonstration was called, only to be cancelled closer to the date. The effect of this action by the local campaign was to deflate the whole struggle for probably



a couple of years and to effectively vindicate the Guards violent tactics. In the film, the only analysis of this key moment comes from Maura Harrington. She blamed a 'lack of courage', yet there was much more than this involved. The Mayo campaign, in an effort to stay united, had caved in to the wishes of a conservative but influential minority, most especially local TD Jerry Cowley and campaign spokesperson Mark Garavan. This whole episode also highlighted the failure of campaigning and political groups from outside the area to better support a traumatised community and

to give that community the support it needed to hold firm at this crucial time.

The documentary's central theme, however, is well presented. Local people had fears related to health and safety issues; on the basis of these fears they refused their consent to the project going ahead and for many years fought to stop the project from getting off the ground. Years later, their concerns have still not been addressed, the contentious pipeline is still not built and resistance is ongoing. 'The Pipe' catches the spirit of this resistance beautifully.

The Budget & the Rich

The government's economic think-tank, the ESRI, wrote in the Irish Times in the aftermath of the budget that the measures taken over the past four years have been "strongly progressive" i.e. that they redistributed wealth from the rich to the poor. However, this is a somewhat convenient timeframe to apply and ignores the impacts of the measures announced in the 2011 budget.

Vincent O'Malley



A number of individuals and organisations subsequently addressed the fallacy of this argument. Firstly, Pat O'Brien pointed out in the Sunday Business Post that self-employed people with incomes over €175,000 had their income tax rate cut by 3%, while the "Universal Social Charge" (a combination of the income and health levies) will now be payable by everyone with an income over €4,004 as compared to €15,046 previously. The Unite trade union then calculated that "those who earn €1 million a year will pay €10,936 more on income tax and PRSI but that under the Universal Social Charge, they will pay €34,931 less than under the Health and Income levies which they replaced." Their economic advisor, Michael Taft, details further (www.irishleftreview.org/2010/12/08/creepy-millionaires-budget/) how the budget has redistributed wealth from the poor to the rich.

If you look past the effects on people's incomes, it also becomes clear that the intended effects of the budget are somewhat at odds with the ESRI's analysis.

Sara Burke, writing in the Irish Times on 14/12/10, outlines how cuts in the minimum wage and social welfare, VAT increases and the imposition of charges for health services as well as cuts in said services will impact disproportionately on the poor. While the tax system may remain moderately progressive as a whole (if you allow for the super rich who often pay tax at effective rates in single figures), none of the above outcomes could be described as "strongly progressive", if the word is to retain any meaning and not just becomes another euphemism for attacks on the poor and workers, like "reform" and "adjustment".

The Irish Anarchist Review

anatomy of a crisis

Irish Anarchist Review

The Workers Solidarity Movement is very pleased to announce the second issue of *The Irish Anarchist Review*. This magazine is dedicated to understanding the contemporary political, economic and social situation that confronts us, and finding ways to advance alternatives.

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