

# Social Security and the Class Struggle THE TOWNSEND PLAN

## The Panacea of a Quack Doctor

The United States is a country of colossal social contradictions. Here exist side by side the greatest wealth and the direst poverty; the most advanced industrial techniques and the biggest army of unemployed; the most confident of ruling classes and the most restless of peoples; unsurpassed heights of technological development and an extremely low level of political life.

The friction and energy generated by the clash of these antagonistic conditions give a tremendous impetus to all social movements in this country. Utopian crusades to reform capitalism, like Technocracy, rise up overnight and sweep through the middle classes like prairie fires. The easily combustible social material distributed in large quantities among the middle classes, is however, quickly consumed. These middle-class reform and Utopian movements have neither stamina nor stability. They fade away as speedily as they spring to life, leaving only the wreckage of ruined hopes behind.

The American workers are not wonted into political action on their own account so easily as the middle classes. (Their wrath burns more slowly but more surely.) They find their first field of organization and action on the industrial front. Strike after strike in the past period has demonstrated that when American workers are aroused and ready for combat, they spring into action with the power, ferocity, and agility of tigers. We can be confident that, once they take the road of independent political action, they will move as fast and as furiously in politics as they are doing today on the industrial arena.

The social reforms secured by the people under a capitalist regime are invariably by-products of the class struggle. They are exacted from the bourgeoisie by organized social force; and granted because of their fear of the consequences of refusal. The number of social reforms accorded to its citizens is an accurate gauge of the degree of development of the class struggle in any bourgeois democracy. The immaturity of the class struggle in the United States—thanks to the exceptionally fortunate position occupied by American capitalism in

world economy—is directly reflected in the absence of any national system of social insurance comparable to those which were established before and after the war in other democratic countries. Almost every European state (including Germany before Hitler discarded them wholesale) had been forced to institute some system of state provision for the aged, the unemployed, the industrially injured, etc., long before these questions acquired national political importance on this side of the Atlantic.

Until recently, the policy of laissez faire and the devil take the hindmost prevailed in regard to social services as in so many other spheres of American life. "Charity" was no concern of the Federal government; at most it might be the concern of the separate states; but it was better to leave such Christian duties to individuals, religious groups, or plutocratic philanthropy. The system of administering relief to the aged and the unemployed was long divided between petty public and private agencies—with the result that a majority of the needy were either completely neglected or supported by their families and friends.

This laissez-faire policy has been radically reversed since 1933. Hard on the heels of the granting of unemployment relief follows the demand for other forms of social relief, unemployment, disability, old-age, maternity, widows' and mothers' insurance. The most persistent of these has been the cry for old-age pensions. The prevailing insecurity, economic disintegration, and widespread unemployment, the tendency of American industry and business to discard all but the youngest and most vigorous workers; the ten-year increase in the average life-span of the American people, have given birth to a demand for old-age pensions which is being heard throughout the length of the land. "If military veterans are entitled to bonuses, medical care, and pensions from the government, why should not we social veterans receive as much," the old people are asking. And along comes the Townsend with an answer to their prayers. Such is the social background out of which the Townsend movement has emerged.

only dangerous in principle; it is hopeless in any practical sense. No capitalist country could conceivably afford the costs of administering and financing such a plan without going into bankruptcy. For this reason, if for no others, capitalist politicians will see to it that the plan is not adopted. However, the demand for old-age pensions is very powerful and cannot be easily allayed. If the movement becomes sufficiently threatening in the radical form of the Townsend Plan, it will become necessary to derail the movement by palming off some harmless substitute upon the people. Another thin plank will have to be added to Roosevelt's spurious social security program.

The petty-bourgeois Utopian character of the Townsend movement dooms it to disintegration and destruction. The Epic movement of Upton Sinclair, which aimed to conquer the country, is today crumbling to pieces. The Townsend old-age pension movement, which has an even narrower social and political basis, is sure to follow suit. The middle classes are pragmatic; they demand immediate results; and when these are not forthcoming, will desert a movement as quickly as they flocked to it. The Townsend movement can easily be divided, diverted, and disintegrated by wily politicians, who can steal Townsend's plank and whittle it down to a toothpick.

### The Struggle for Social Insurance

A correct struggle for social insurance should possess three characteristics. First, it should be made an integral part of a broad campaign for workers' security, based upon a rounded program of immediate social demands: adequate cash relief; a coordinated plan of public works, unemployment insurance, the universal 30-hour week, etc. Such a rounded program is contained in the Workers' Security Bill of the National Unemployed League. Second, social services should be financed by income taxes upon the wealthy, not by sales taxes upon the poor. Third, the fight for these demands must be a class-struggle fight, not a class-collaboration lobby.

Neither the Townsend Plan nor the Roosevelt Social Security Act passes any of these tests. The unemployment provisions of the Social Security Act do not include the present unemployed; workers can enjoy its benefits only if the states enact unemployment insurance laws, and then only after reserves have been built up for two years (so far only nine states have passed the necessary legislation); agricultural, professional, and domestic workers are excluded from its application. The payroll method of financing unemployment insurance under the Act differs in only one respect from the sales-tax. While the sales-tax is levied at the point of purchase, the payroll tax is levied at the point of production. The result is the same. The consuming masses foot the bills in the form of higher prices.

The Frazier-Lundeen Bill, now before Congress, which is sponsored by the Communist party, avoids the first two of these errors but is guilty of the third. It provides for a comprehensive system of social insurance for six categories of the population, unemployment, self-employment, disability, old age, maternity, widow and mothers' insurance, and it proposes to "raise the

surplus funds required by suitable revenue legislation from high incomes, corporate surpluses, and other accumulated wealth."

Yet, though more comprehensive and realistic than the Townsend Plan, and less fraudulent than the Social Security Act, it nevertheless is essentially Utopian and reformist in character. This is apparent in the fourth clause of the "Declaration of Policy" prefacing the Bill, which reads: "The system must be administered democratically by workers, representative of local workers and familiar with local work conditions and opportunities, pursuant to rules and regulations in the social interest (1), to prevent administration against the interests of workers, and to insure administration in accordance with their needs and interests." The (Stalinist) Inter-professional Association for Social Insurance, which drafted the bill, confirms this in its own pronouncements. "The bill," they say, "does not ask one group to do something for another group who are unfortunate. Perish the thought! On the contrary, it suggests that the people as a whole provide by legislation for the people as a whole."

Proposals that the working class and its organizations shall take over one of the official functions of the state have only one meaning. That it is possible for the workers to use the capitalist state for their own good, that they can improve their conditions not by struggling against the state and its agents but by working with it and becoming a part of it, that there is no necessity for overthrowing the state so long as an opportunity exists of accommodating themselves to it. The class nature of the capitalist state is ignored and the struggle for these demands is restricted entirely within parliamentary lines. Nothing is left but the most vulgar illusions of petty bourgeois reformism—and that is precisely what the bill is designed to foster.

### Reformism and Revolutionary Policy

Revolutionists cannot afford to turn their backs upon any movement, however Utopian it may be, which enlists wide strata of the people in an anti-capitalist and progressive struggle. On the other hand, they cannot allow themselves to endorse such Utopian schemes, or refrain from exposing their fallacies and reactionary features. Above all, they cannot unconditionally support movements which nourish illusions about the nature of the state or aid in the practical or theoretical suppression of the class struggle. To do so is to play the role of camp-follower of the petty bourgeoisie instead of fulfilling their function as independent leaders of the working class in their struggles.

It is important to the labor movement that the struggle for old-age pensions and social insurance be carried through to a successful conclusion. While such reforms are increasingly difficult to obtain under the present conditions of capitalist decline, they are by no means impossible of attainment. Whatever their ultimate success, the agitation for them serves to focus attention upon the inability of our present social system to care for its industrial veterans. Every social concession wrested from the capitalist masters of society heightens our morale and fighting spirit.

The revolutionist must constantly point out the following facts. First, that such reforms can only be obtained by independent labor action and militant politics. Second, that once gained, the workers must be on guard to see that the reactionaries do not rob them of the fruits

of their victories. Third, that under the present conditions of capitalist decline, social reforms cannot be held simply by resting content with the conquests that have been made, but only by carrying forward the fight against capitalist misery and oppression another step toward the revolutionary goal.

Social security for the working masses is a Utopian dream in our present social order. Capitalist reforms are at best but palliatives on an incurably diseased system. These reforms are grudgingly given if finance capital can afford them. As soon as finance capital is forced to tap the national budget to the bone to avoid further taxation on their wealth and enterprises, the masses are the first to feel the knife, as the Means Test imposed on the English workers by the Tory government proves—not to speak of Hitler! As finance capital plunges deeper into crisis, it can find no way to survive and rule in the highly competitive world market except by robbing the workers of all their hard-won democratic rights and social services and putting the Fascist knife to their throats.

There can be security for the workers only in a state where the workers rule and where all the wealth of the country is in the workers' hands. In a workers' republic like the Soviet Union, social services are an integral part of the social order, freely given to all useful citizens. There can be no real salvation and security for the masses until capitalism is overthrown and socialism succeeds it.

# Bare Murder on Ohio WPA

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The new issue of its regular weekly paper, the "WPA Union News," is just off the press and is receiving the widest distribution. The leading article with its challenging headline, "Murder on the WPA," giving the full story of the death of Alonzo Walker, has already received wide comment and is arousing the indignation of all the WPA workers of this county. The Union intends to bring the lesson home that unless the WPA program is changed through the power of the WPA workers themselves, the old conditions will inevitably bring about such catastrophes to the WPA workers involved.

At the regular membership meeting on Sunday, Jan. 26, the union voted to send a floral wreath with the inscription: "We Shall Not Forget—WPA Workers Union." All members not working pledged to attend the funeral. All the others would down tools on the job from 1:30 to 2 P.M. Monday, Jan. 27. About 20 union men attended the funeral services on Monday at the Easley Funeral Home.

Art Preis, chairman of the union, spoke briefly and gave the union's pledge over the body of Walker "to place the responsibility for his murder and erase the conditions which caused his death." The obituary stated as the cause of his death, "Murdered on the WPA." When the casket was carried out of the funeral parlor, Mrs. Walker walked behind it grief-stricken. "They murdered him on the WPA!"

The WPA union sent the following letter to Harry L. Hopkins:

January 27, 1936  
Harry L. Hopkins  
Federal WPA Administrator  
Washington, D.C.  
Dear Sir:

Enclosed please find a copy of the "WPA Union News" of Jan. 26, 1936, which presents in detail the story of the death of Alonzo Walker, a colored WPA worker, and the circumstances which caused the death.

The circumstances as described in the article are of such a character as to indicate absolute criminal negligence on the part of the responsible project officials involved.

On Tuesday morning, Jan. 21, Alonzo Walker reported for work at the Prairie Ditch project in Lucas County, Ohio. Sub-zero weather was blowing in from the northwest, and although this is an open project, no shelter houses were provided for the workers. Walker collapsed from exposure. Mr. Jack Hays and Kasimir Lewkowski, foreman and supervisor of the job respectively, were informed of the man's condition but took no steps to secure medical attention or to transport him to a hospital or his home.

Mr. Walker was permitted to lie out in the open for at least four hours unattended. He was finally taken home by a fellow WPA worker in the latter's car at the regular quitting time, 4:30 P.M. The administration issued no statement on the matter until the following Monday, January 2, when the WPA Workers Union publicly called upon the administration for an accounting and issued a press release to the Toledo papers. Thus a period of six days were allowed to elapse.

The man died on Wednesday, Jan. 22 of double pneumonia, as a result of freezing and over exposure, according to the attending physician, Dr. P. M. Johnson. Dr. Johnson stated that it was too late to save the man when he was finally brought home, as he was literally frozen to death.

We are firm in our belief, as a result of our investigation of the case, that Mr. Walker's death is solely the result of the criminal negligence on the part of the administration officials involved. The local WPA administration is not lacking in culpability, since it requested thousands of WPA workers in this district to report to work on open jobs with no protection during sub-zero weather.

We are demanding a federal investigation into the circumstances of Walker's death and the conditions on the WPA which led to such a tragedy.

Our union is continuing with its own investigation on the case and is securing affidavits from the individuals concerned. We will shortly hold a public meeting on the whole case and present the result of our findings.

We request immediate attention on this case and await your reply to same.

Very truly yours,  
WPA WORKERS UNION  
T. G. Selander, sec'y.

# Labor Defense Front

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determination to suppress revolts. Col. Schreffel suggested that if the audience would imagine itself in their place, it would understand the attitude of "the best people of Alabama." He declared, however, that the Negroes "are well-behaved." "The best people of Alabama wish the case had not come up," the Colonel said, and he undoubtedly knows because, as Minor said, he is "a man of high standing."

Not a word was said to contradict repeated statements that the case would be won "not on platforms but in the Alabama courts." After the Colonel declared that "the best people of Alabama want justice done," Attorney Frankel of the I.L.D. proposed a means of appealing to them. He wants the case transferred to a Federal court, where the jurors are "people of standing . . . more likely to reach independent judgments because, unlike the Decatur jurors, they would not fear their neighbors." Herndon proposed pressure on Roosevelt to get into a Federal court, and demanded that Federal troops be sent to Alabama. He also demanded the electrocution of Sheriff Sandlin, who shot Powell, and the impeachment of Gov. Bibb Graves—by the Alabama legislature!

The meeting's immediate aim was not 100 percent clear. Herndon and Frankel declared the boys must go free. But the Colonel sounded less adamant. "Even at its worst," he said, "the life of this boy (Patterson) is saved, and that is something we ought to be thankful for."

"Fair Play and Justice" The speakers, however, had further aims. Undoubtedly due to sentiments inspired by his military background, the Colonel wants to see "fair play and justice" vindicated. Herndon spoke of "the uplifting of humanity." The school teacher seeks for Negroes the same rights as are enjoyed by everybody else in America. Frankel seeks to preserve democratic government. And in general, everybody wants to protect the Stars and Stripes. For example:

Minor declared that he is "seeking to defend our nation by defending these boys," fighting for "our country's welfare—our America." Wilkins declared that he fights for "the salvation of all the people of the U. S., those on top as well as those suffering underneath," and thundered that this crime must be stopped "in the name of God and the United States!" Thereupon he asked who would give \$50 "for the elevation of his soul."

Herndon's call for Federal troops was supported by his demand for a return "to the traditions of our forefathers," who, it seems, always treated the Negroes properly. The Colonel, however, asked no "return" or other change: he declared that lynchings in America are not like those in Germany because here it is not done by the government. His hymn to America culminated in the following remark: "True, there were 20 lynchings last year, but in 80 cases people were saved from lynching by the authorities." It is clear what Minor meant when he called the Colonel "a man who has the courage and American manhood to speak out."

Quite honestly, the Scottsboro Defense Committee did not announce this as a protest meeting. It was called "to analyze" the present situation. It did that—but not from the viewpoint of those who believe in a militant struggle to save the Scottsboro boys.

### HERNDON CASE AGAIN IN COURT

The appeal of the State of Georgia from the County Court decision which recently set Angelo Herndon free, was heard by the Georgia Supreme Court last week. It is not yet known whether the court will agree that the insurrection law under which Herndon had been sentenced to 20 years on the chain gang is unconstitutional, or whether it will send Herndon back to serve his sentence. If it does the latter, the defense will appeal to the U. S. Supreme Court.

Herndon was represented by Attorneys W. N. Seymour of New York and W. A. Sutherland of Atlanta, retained by the I.L.D. As in the county court hearing where Herndon upset the sentence, Seymour dealt with the legal questions involved in the case.

Sutherland again made a political speech, similar in character to the one he made in the county court. He complained that the case "has been used as a spearhead for the liberals throughout the country," and again urged the court to allow some freedom of speech in order to preserve the existing order. "When a man like Herndon is made a martyr," he said, "there is real danger to democracy."

The Joint Committee to Aid the Herndon Defense, an auxiliary body with no control over Sutherland or over the legal defense policy, is continuing to circulate petitions for Herndon's freedom through its constituents. Among the latter is the Non-Partisan Labor Defense, which urges all supporters with filled-out petitions to send them in to the nearest N.P.L.D. branch.

RUSSELL CASE

Because of the heavy load of work on the shoulders of the Minneapolis and St. Paul branches of the N.P.L.D., the National Executive Board of that organization is conducting a special national drive for funds to finance the appeal of Al Russell from a Federal contempt of court sentence.

Russell is now out on bail, obtained with the aid of Minneapolis locals of the A. F. of L. The St. Paul N.P.L.D. has just run a social affair to help provide funds to pay for the transcript of his trial, needed by Francis Heisler, N.P.L.D. attorney, for the preparation of the appeal brief.

The Russell case is important not simply to free this persecuted militant picket, but also in order to prevent the nullification of the Minnesota state anti-injunction law and the Federal anti-injunction law. Funds to appeal the Russell case should go to Adelaide Walker, Treasurer, N.P.L.D., 22 East 17th Street, New York City.

### FERRERO AND SALLITO

The hearing on the deportations of Ferrero and Sallito which was to have been held Jan. 24, has been postponed to Feb. 4. These two anarchist workers are now on Ellis Island while the Ferrero-Sallito Defense Conference, among whose constituents is the N.P.L.D., is carrying on a fight to save them from deportation to Fascist Italy.

Attorney I. Shorr, representing the conference, is seeking a writ of habeas corpus. His associate, Carol King, is conducting a fight for bail. In all districts except that of Southern New York, Federal judges generally grant bail for prisoners held for deportation pending their appeal. The New York judges, however, have always refused to do so, and the fight on this case will set a precedent if victorious.

Continued protests against the deportation of these two workers, guilty of no crime except giving house-room to the editor of a San Francisco newspaper which William Randolph Hearst wants to suppress, should go to D. W. McCormack, Commissioner of Immigration, at Washington, D. C.

### ROBINSON ON THE SPOT

Frederick B. Robinson, reactionary president of the College of the City of New York, who has hounded with Fascists, expelled anti-Fascist students, and terrorized many of his professors into giving him hypocritical praise, is on the spot. A committee of alumni has called on the Board of Education to remove him. They give as the reason the fact that he "lacks qualities of leadership." The committee has won the support of the Alumni Association by a vote of 519 to 217.

Back of this development is a long campaign by radical and liberal students to establish academic freedom in New York's leading public college. In this fight the Non-Partisan Labor Defense has played an active role.

A year ago its representative, Herbert Solow, speaking for the Columbus Day United Anti-Fascist Committee, turned the La Guardia-dominated city Board of Estimate on its ear by taking the floor during the hearings on the city budget and proposing to reduce Robinson's salary to \$1 per year. Aldermanic President Deutsch, recently deceased hero of the League Against War and Fascism, intervened on Robinson's behalf and had police drag the N.P.L.D. spokesman out of the chamber.

Now, however, it looks as though Robinson might lose his job altogether; a continued militant fight, which should be led by students and labor unions, can make this outcome certain.

### MINI APPEAL

Attorney R. W. Henderson is continuing his legal fight to get copies of the transcript of trial proceedings for all the Sacramento criminal syndicalism defendants, according to an announcement by the National Sacramento Appeal Committee. In a short time, if all these moves fail, he will demand a writ of habeas corpus since Norman Mini, Prisoner 57606 in San Quentin, is being denied the right of appeal.

Attorney Leo Gallagher of the I.L.D. recently sought a habeas corpus on the grounds that the other defendants, like Mini, had been denied bail pending appeal. The Appellate Court held that trial judge Dal M. Lemmon of Sacramento had the right to refuse bail.

Protests against the further incarceration of Mini, Caroline Decker, Pat Chambers and the other Sacramento trade unionists, should be sent at once to the Board of Parole, Sacramento, Calif. They should stress the fact that the defendants were convicted of no overt acts, and that one of the convicting jurors has confessed that the verdict was reached as a result of a horse-trade.

Funds are still needed by the N. S.A.C. and should be sent to Harry W. Laidler, Chairman, Room 707, 51 Union Square, New York City.

### The Townsend Crusade

The Townsend Old-Age Pension Plan, which was restricted a year ago to the West Coast, has today become a national crusade, embracing millions of people and counting thousands of clubs throughout the country. The Townsend Plan has made the idea of old-age pensions a political issue of the first magnitude. Not since the days of the temperance movement has there been anything quite like it. In fact, the organizational and political methods of the Townsend Clubs are modeled after those of the Anti-Saloon Leagues.

### The Townsend Panacea

What is this remarkable remedy that is going to cure all the ills of American capitalism at one gulp? The Townsend Plan has suffered many changes since it was first formulated by its genial parent and will undoubtedly be modified many more times before it sinks into oblivion along with Technocracy. Like all Utopian panaceas, it is extremely simple in essence. In its very simplicity lies both its initial strength and its ultimate impotence.

The scheme has two major ingredients. The first is the bait by which the suckers are hooked. All Americans over sixty are to be paid \$200 a month for life by the government on condition that they withdraw from productive work and spend the pension within the month. According to Townsend, this flow of money will supply the extra purchasing power needed to keep the wheels of commerce turning without interruption. Anyone acquainted with the petty-bourgeois reuters of Southern California will immediately recognize in this part of the plan the passport to paradise.

Two hundred dollars a month and no work is the wish-fulfillment of every retired Middle-Western farmer and his wife.

But there is a hook concealed within the bait—the method of financing the enterprise. The Townsend Plan proposes that the 24 billion dollars a year for the Plan be secured by a two-percent tax on all commercial transactions. To all the processing-taxes and sales-taxes that have plagued and impoverished the consuming masses in the past few years is to be added a monstrous sales-tax of two-percent!

All taxes, except taxes upon income, are ultimately paid for by the consuming masses, among whom the workers are in the majority. The effect of such taxes is always to force up the prices of the necessities of life. The Townsend two percent transaction tax would raise the cost of living to unheard-of heights. Ninety-nine percent of the

billions upon the movement in attempts to smash it. The conservative economists in the universities, the editorial writers in the metropolitan papers, the publicity men of the capitalist parties are busy issuing blasts against it. Meanwhile, the Townsend Clubs are becoming political powers in locality after locality. Peanut politicians of all parties from the Republican to the Communist find it necessary to come to terms with the Townsend vote in their districts. Feeling their strength, the Townsends are already boasting of taking over the government after the next election and ushering in the millennium.

most of the plan would be borne by the already impoverished masses. These masses are today saddled with the support of their parents and grandparents. What, then, is gained by the Townsend Plan? Nothing. It is simply a sleight-of-hand trick which proposes that the masses should increase the allowances they now give their elders to stratospheric heights—without giving them any way to obtain any added income. On the contrary, their real incomes will be immeasurably less because of the increased price of everything they buy. The Townsend Plan is a transcendental fraud.

Once the nut is cracked open, it is not difficult to expose the reactionary kernel within the radical shell of the Townsend Plan. But the poor fish who are attracted by it either cannot see this, or discount its dangers. The benign doctor himself, for example, glibly remarks that the withdrawal of all the old people from industry will make labor so scarce that the industrialist would have to raise wages to war-time levels. But even war-time wages would not suffice to meet the increased cost of living that would follow the application of the plan. Furthermore, eleven million unemployed testify that labor-power is not a scarce commodity today.

Utopian prophets and their disciples are invariably people without knowledge or political experience. They are fanatics with one idea that is sure to bring universal salvation. Having developed their idea of old age pensions into a scheme for redeeming capitalism, neither Townsend nor his followers waste any further thought upon their plan. Their sole aim is to translate it into reality as soon as possible, regardless of the practical consequences of its application. But, like all its Utopian predecessors, the Townsend Plan must inevitably be wrecked upon the rocks of social realities.

For the Townsend Plan is not

# 700 at Tampa Protest in NY

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campaign of pressure for a real prosecution of the vigilantes; and for the protection of Poulnot and Rogers when they return to Tampa.

Executive Council Backs Down The A. F. of L. Executive Council, after first refusing to settle the

place of the next annual A. F. of L. convention—originally called for Tampa—has now given a half-hearted indication that they will not withdraw from Tampa. The president of the State Federation of Florida is working overtime to keep the business in his state, and will not help the fight against vigilantes.

The Joint Committee has sold 22,000 copies of its pamphlet, "Tampa—Tar and Terror," and is printing a new edition. Copies may be ordered from the Non-Partisan

Labor Defense, 22 East 17th Street. Contributions for the Committee's work should go to Mary Fox, treasurer, 112 East 19th Street.

At a mass meeting held in the Hotel Delano last week, New York workers pledged their support to the Committee. Among the speakers were Norman Thomas of the I.L.D., Sam Wiener of the G.D.C., George Novack of the N.P.L.D., Poulnot and Rogers. A resolution of protest was adopted and sent to Tampa authorities.

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