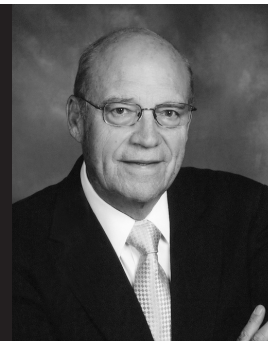




Dr. Fred Schwarz

# The Schwarz Report



Dr. David Noebel

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## On Liberation Theology

by Ion Mihai Pacepa

In 1984 a Summit Ministries professor, Ronald H. Nash, edited a telling volume entitled *On Liberation Theology*. The work included chapters by Carl Henry, Michael Novak, Harold O.J. Brown, etc. Henry comes as close to the following article by Ion Mihai as any of the writers. He wrote: “Liberation theology presupposes that social classes are byproducts of a capitalistic society, and that all ethical ecclesiastical thought and effort must promote the overthrow of that society and replace it with a socialist alternative. Hence, liberation theology opposes reformist effort—economic assistance to churches in poorer lands by churches in wealthier lands, for example—on the ground that such ‘superficial changes’ would only postpone radical alteration [i.e., a communist revolution] of basic economic structures.” (p. 197)

History often repeats itself, and if you have lived two lives, as I have done, you have a good chance of seeing the reenactment with your own eyes.

Liberation theology, of which not much has been heard for two decades, is back in the news. But what is not being mentioned is its origins. It was not invented by Latin American Catholics. It was developed by the KGB. The man who is now the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, secretly worked for the KGB under the code name “Mikhailov” and spent four decades promoting liberation theology, which we at the top of the Eastern European intelligence community nicknamed Christianized Marxism.

Liberation theology has been generally understood to be a marriage of Marxism and Christianity. What has not been understood is that it was not the product of Christians who pursued Communism, but of Communists who pursued Christians. I described the birth of liberation theology in my book *Disinformation*, co-authored with Professor Ronald Rychlak. Its genesis was part of a highly classified Party/State Disinformation Program, formally approved in 1960 by KGB chairman Aleksandr Shelepin and Politburo member Aleksei Kirichenko, then the second in the party hierarchy after Nikita Khrushchev.

In 1971, the KGB sent Kirill—who had just been elevated to the rank of archimandrite—to Geneva as emissary of the Russian Orthodox Church to the World Council of Churches. The WCC was, and still is, the largest international religious organization after the Vatican, representing some 550 million Christians of various denominations in 120 countries. Kirill/Mikhailov’s main task was to involve the WCC in spreading the new liberation theology throughout Latin America. In 1975, the KGB was able to infiltrate Kirill into the Central Committee of the WCC—a position he held until he was “elected” patriarch of Russia, in 2009. Not long after he joined the Central Committee, Kirill reported to the KGB: “Now the agenda of the WCC is also our agenda.”

During Kirill’s years at the helm of the WCC, liberation theology put down deep roots in Latin America—where the map now has significant patches of red. Russian military ships and bombers are back in Cuba for the first time since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, and Russia has also newly sent ships and bombers to Venezuela.

Pope John Paul II, who knew the Communist playbook well, was not taken in by the Soviets’ liberation theology. In 1983, his friend and trusted colleague Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), who at that time was head of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, discarded as Marxist the liberation-theology idea that class struggle is fundamental to history. The cardinal called liberation theology a “singular heresy” and blasted it as a “fundamental threat” to the Church.

Of course, it was and remains a threat—one deliberately designed to undermine the Church and destabilize the West by subordinating religion to an atheist political ideology for its geopolitical gain.

Now names—like Oscar Romero and Miguel d’Escoto Brockmann—not heard since the 1980s, when the Soviet Union was still en vogue, are again making international news. And here we are. The promoters of a KGB-inspired religious ideology, which once embraced violent Marxist revolution, are now denying its link to Marxism and to the KGB.

Each society reflects its own past. Down through the ages, everyone who has sat on the Kremlin throne—autocratic tsar, Communist leader, or democratically elected president—has been preoccupied with controlling all expressions of religion that might impinge on his political ambitions. When Ivan IV—the Terrible—had himself crowned in 1547 as Russia’s first tsar, he also made himself head of the Russian Orthodox Church. Tsarism and Communism may have been swallowed up by the sands of time, but the Kremlin continues this tradition.

Throughout its history, Russia has been a samoderzhaviye, a traditional Russian form of totalitarian autocracy in which a feudal lord rules the country and the church with the help of his political police force. The latter, whenever it had a sticky image problem, simply changed its name—from Okhrana to Cheka, to GPU, to OGPU, to NKVD, to NKGB, to MGB, to MVD, to KGB—and pretended it was a brand new organization.

Many deceased KGB officers must have been chorling in their graves on New Year’s Eve, 1999, when their old boss, Vladimir Putin, at one time my KGB counterpart, enthroned himself in the Kremlin. During the Cold War, the KGB was a state within a state. Now the KGB—rechristened FSB—is the state itself. According to a study published in the Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, by 2003, some 6,000 former KGB officers were running Russia’s federal and local governments. The respected British newspaper the *Guardian* reports that President Putin has secretly accumulated over \$40 billion, becoming Europe’s richest man.

In Russia, the more things change, the more they seem to stay the same.

This brings us back to Kirill/Mikhailov. In 2006 Archbishop Kirill’s personal wealth was estimated at \$4 billion by the *Moscow News*. No wonder. In the mid-1990s, the Russian Orthodox Church’s Department for External Church Relations, managed by Kirill, was granted the privilege of duty-free importation of cigarettes as reward for his loyalty to the KGB. It did not take long for him to become the largest supplier of foreign cigarettes in Russia.

A few years ago, while Kirill was visiting Ukraine as the new Patriarch of Russia, a newspaper published a photo in which the prelate could be seen wearing a Breguet wristwatch, the price of which was estimated at 30,000 euros. The Russian newspaper *Kommersant* accused Kirill of abusing the privilege of duty-free importation of cigarettes, and dubbed him the “tobacco metropolitan.” Kirill denied having such a watch. He said the photograph must have been altered by his enemies, and he posted the “real” photograph on his official website. A careful study of this “real” photograph, however, shows that the Breguet watch had been airbrushed off his wrist, but its reflection is still clearly visible on a table surface beneath his arm.

Mikhailov and his KGB, rechristened FSB, are now doing their best to airbrush out the apron strings connecting them to liberation theology. Let’s not allow them to succeed.

—Lieutenant General (retired) Ion Mihai Pacepa is the highest-ranking Soviet-bloc official ever to defect to the West. His last book, *Disinformation*, co-authored with Professor Ronald Rychlak and published by WND, is currently being made into a Hollywood movie.

—*National Review Online*, April 23, 2015



## The Pope and Liberation Theology

by Jim Yardley and Simon Romero

VATICAN CITY — Six months after becoming the first Latin American pontiff, Pope Francis invited an octogenarian priest from Peru for a private chat at his Vatican residence. Not listed on the pope’s schedule, the September 2013 meeting with the priest, Gustavo Gutiérrez, soon

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became public—and was just as quickly interpreted as a defining shift in the Roman Catholic Church.

Father Gutiérrez is a founder of liberation theology, the Latin American movement embracing the poor and calling for social change, which conservatives once scorned as overtly Marxist and the Vatican treated with hostility. Now, Father Gutiérrez is a respected Vatican visitor, and his writings have been praised in the official Vatican newspaper. Francis has brought other Latin American priests back into favor and often uses language about the poor that has echoes of liberation theology.

And then came Saturday, when throngs packed San Salvador for the beatification ceremony of the murdered Salvadoran archbishop Óscar Romero, leaving him one step from sainthood.

The first pope from the developing world, Francis has placed the poor at the center of his papacy. In doing so, he is directly engaging with a theological movement that once sharply divided Catholics and was distrusted by his predecessors, Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. Even Francis, as a young Jesuit leader in Argentina, had qualms.

Now, Francis speaks of creating “a poor church for the poor” and is seeking to position Catholicism closer to the masses—a spiritual mission that comes as he is also trying to revive the church in Latin America, where it has steadily lost ground to evangelical congregations.

For years, Vatican critics of liberation theology and conservative Latin American bishops helped stall the canonization process for Archbishop Romero, even though many Catholics in the region regard him as a towering moral figure: an outspoken critic of social injustice and political repression who was assassinated during Mass in 1980. Francis broke the stalemate.

“It is very important,” Father Gutiérrez said. “Somebody who is assassinated for this commitment to his people will illuminate many things in Latin America.”

The beatification is the prelude to what is likely to be a defining period of Francis’ papacy, with trips to South America, Cuba, and the United States; the release of a much-awaited encyclical on environmental degradation and the poor; and a meeting in Rome to determine whether and how the church will change its approach to issues like homosexuality, contraception and divorce.

By advancing the campaign for Archbishop Romero’s sainthood, Francis is sending a signal that the allegiance of his church is to the poor, who once saw some bishops as more aligned with discredited governments, many analysts say. Indeed, Archbishop Romero was regarded as a

popular saint in El Salvador even as the Vatican blocked his canonization process.

“It is not liberation theology that is being rehabilitated,” said Michael E. Lee, an associate professor of theology at Fordham University who has written extensively about liberation theology. “It is the church that is being rehabilitated.”

Liberation theory includes a critique of the structural causes of poverty and a call for the church and the poor to organize for social change. Mr. Lee said it was a broad school of thought: Movements differed in different countries, with some more political in nature and others less so. The broader movement emerged after a major meeting of Latin American bishops in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968 and was rooted in the belief that the plight of the poor should be central to interpreting the Bible and to the Christian mission.

But with the Cold War in full force, some critics denounced liberation theology as Marxist, and a conservative backlash quickly followed. At the Vatican, John Paul II, the Polish pope who would later be credited for helping topple the Soviet Union, became suspicious of the political elements of the new Latin American movements.

“All that rhetoric made the Vatican very nervous,” said Ivan Petrella, an Argentine lawmaker and scholar of liberation theology. “If you were coming from behind the Iron Curtain, you could smell some communism in there.”

John Paul reacted by appointing conservative bishops in Latin America and by supporting conservative Catholic groups such as Opus Dei and the Legionaries of Christ, which opposed liberation theology. In the 1980s, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger—later to become Pope Benedict XVI, but then the Vatican’s enforcer of doctrine—issued two statements on liberation theology. The first was very critical, but the second was milder, leading some analysts to wonder if the Vatican was easing up.

From his 1973 appointment as head of the Jesuits in Argentina, Francis, then 36 and known as Jorge Mario Bergoglio, was viewed as deeply concerned with the poor. But religious figures who knew him then say Francis, like much of Argentina’s Catholic establishment, thought liberation theology was too political. Critics also blamed him for failing to prevent the kidnapping and torture of two priests sympathetic to liberation theology.

Some in the church hierarchy considered Francis divisive and autocratic in his 15 years leading the Jesuits. The church authorities sent him into what amounted to stretches of exile, first in Germany and then in Córdoba, Argentina, a period in which he later described having “a

time of great interior crisis.”

He practiced spiritual exercises and changed his leadership style to involve greater dialogue. When he was named archbishop of Buenos Aires, his focus became those left behind by Argentina’s economic upheaval.

“With the end of the Cold War, he began to see that liberation theology was not synonymous with Marxism, as many conservatives had claimed,” said Paul Vallely, author of *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*. Argentina’s financial crisis in the early years of the 21st century also shaped his views, as he “began to see that economic systems, not just individuals, could be sinful,” Mr. Vallely added.

Since becoming pope, Francis has expressed strong criticism of capitalism, acknowledging that globalization has lifted many people from poverty but saying it has also created great disparities and “condemned many others to hunger.” He has warned, “Without a solution to the problems of the poor, we cannot resolve the problems of the world.”

In Argentina, some critics are unconvinced that Francis’ outspokenness about the poor represents an embrace of liberation theology. “He never took the reins of liberation theology because it’s radical,” said Rubén Rufino Dri, who worked in the late 1960s and 1970s with a group of priests active in the slums of Buenos Aires.

To him, Francis’ decision to expedite Archbishop Romero’s beatification was a political one, part of what Mr. Rufino Dri views as a “superficial transformation” of the Catholic Church as it competes in Latin America with secularism as well as other branches of Christianity.

“It’s a populist maneuver by a great politician,” he said.

Others offered a more nuanced view. José María di Paola, 53, a priest who is close to Francis and once worked with him among the poor of Buenos Aires, said the beatification reflected a broader push by Francis to reduce the Vatican’s focus on Europe. “It’s part of a process to bring an end to the church’s Eurocentric interpretation of the world and have a more Latin American viewpoint,” he said.

Father di Paola added that while Francis had never proposed evangelizing under the banner of liberation theology during his time in Argentina, his commitment to the poor should not be questioned. “Francis’ passage through the slums of the capital influenced him later as a bishop and pope,” he said. “Experiencing the life values of the poor transformed his heart.”

As pope, Francis has expanded the roles of centrists sympathetic to liberation theology, such as Cardinal Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga of Honduras, in contrast to

the clout once wielded in Latin America by conservative cardinals like Alfonso López Trujillo of Colombia, who died in 2008.

“Trujillo represented the thinking that liberation theology was a Trojan horse in which communism would enter the church, something that is finally coming undone with Pope Francis,” said Leonardo Boff, 76, a prominent Brazilian theologian who has written on liberation theology.

Many analysts note that John Paul and Benedict never outright denounced liberation theology and slowly started to pivot in their views. In 2012, Benedict reopened Archbishop Romero’s beatification case. Cardinal Gerhard Müller, a staunch conservative who heads the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican’s enforcer of doctrine, became a proponent of liberation theology after working in Peru, where he met Father Gutiérrez. The two men have since written books together.

“There was no rehabilitation because there was never a ‘dehabilitation,’ ” Father Gutiérrez said, contesting the idea that liberation theology was ever cast out of the church. “In past years, there was talk of condemnation, and people believed it. What there was was a critical dialogue, which had difficult moments but which really was clarified over time.”

Francis often urges believers to act on behalf of the poor, saying if they do, they will be transformed. For those who knew Archbishop Romero in El Salvador, this transformation was notable. Once considered a conservative, he began to change in the mid-1970s, when he was the bishop of a rural diocese where government soldiers had massacred peasants. Shortly after he became archbishop of San Salvador, he was horrified when a close friend, a Jesuit priest, was murdered, and he soon began to speak out against government terror and repression.

“He began to surprise people,” said Jon Sobrino, a prominent liberation theologian who became close to Archbishop Romero and credited his transformation to his embrace of the poor.

“They made him be different, be more radical, like Jesus,” Father Sobrino said. “He drew near to them, and they approached him, asking for help in their suffering. That was what changed him.”

In 2007, Father Sobrino had his own clash with the Vatican when the doctrinal office disputed some of his writings. He refused to alter them and attributed the freeze on Archbishop Romero’s beatification partly to Vatican hostility.

“It has taken a new pope to change the situation,” he said.

—*The New York Times*, May 24, 2015, p. A1

# The Pope, Cuba, and Liberation Theology

by Mary Anastasia O'Grady

The warmth and hospitality that Pope Francis showed to Raúl Castro at the Vatican last week has baffled many Catholics—and for good reason. The dictator went to Rome for a PR boost. The pontiff obliged him.

During their encounter Castro mocked the faith with a quip about returning to the church if the pope behaved. He also mocked every Cuban refugee, dead or alive, by giving the pope, of all things, a piece of art depicting a migrant at prayer. Pope Francis gave the dictator a copy of his 2013 apostolic exhortation titled “The Joy of the Gospel,” in which he sharply criticizes economic freedom. Talk about preaching to the converted. As Raúl put it, “The pontiff is a Jesuit, and I, in some way, am too. I studied at Jesuit schools.” No kidding.

It's always possible that Pope Francis is hoping to get close to the regime in order to change it. Maybe he has in mind a spiritual version of a Trojan horse that once inside the gates of Cuban hell will unleash an army of angels.

With God all things are possible. But I suspect that this papal rapprochement with Castro has more mundane roots.

The Holy Father is a native of 20th-century Argentina, ideologically defined by nationalism, socialism, corporatism, and anti-Americanism. It wouldn't be surprising to learn that this influences his views toward the US and the island 90 miles from its shores.

When the Cuban dictatorship lost its Soviet sugar daddy in the early 1990s, it nearly crumbled. Last year deep economic troubles again looked as if they might force change. As Venezuelan oil subsidies to Havana slowed, the rotting system teetered on the edge of collapse.

It was an opportunity for the church to show solidarity with the powerless Cuban people—or at least stand back. Instead the Vatican stepped in to help the Castros. In December we learned that Pope Francis brokered the Obama-Castro thaw, which while unlikely to spur improvements in human rights is already generating new interest in investing with the military government.

Some Catholics have tried to excuse the pope's hostility toward economic freedom in “The Joy of the Gospel” by arguing that he grew up in a corrupt state-run economy and probably mistook it for a capitalist system. This is nonsense. Argentine statism explicitly denounces market economics. There is another more plausible explanation for why the pope shows disdain in his exhortation for “a

crude and naive trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system.” It lies in an Argentine sense of cultural superiority over the money-grubbing capitalists to the north and faith in the state to protect it.

Mexican historian Enrique Krauze traces this to an intellectual backlash against the US after the Spanish defeat in the Spanish-American war. Examples he cites in his 2011 book *Redeemers* include the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío and the Franco-Argentine historian Paul Grousac, who both painted Americans as uncivilized beasts. According to Mr. Krauze, the southern cone—especially Argentina—also had imported the idea of a “socialism that fought to improve the economic, cultural, and educational level of the poor, while generating a nationalist state.”

In 1900 Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó published *Ariel*, which emphasized “the superiority of Latin culture over the mere utilitarianism espoused” by the North. Rodó was “the first ideologue of Latin American nationalism,” and his influence spread throughout the region. “Latin Americanism, especially in the South, was also anti-Yankeeism,” Mr. Krauze writes.

Fast forward 115 years and Cuba is again a symbol of struggle between the North and the South. Many Latin American intellectuals don't like the dictatorship but they loathe US affluence and power. They know that a full-blown collapse of Cuba would likely bring back the Americans. That's why they tolerate the status quo.

I can only speculate about the Holy Father's Cuba views. But he is earning a dubious political reputation. In August 2014, he lifted the church's 29-year ban on Maryknoll priest Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann's right to celebrate Mass. The communist cleric who once served as Nicaraguan foreign minister for the Marxist Sandinistas was demoted by Pope John Paul II for refusing to get out of politics.

After the ban was lifted, Father d'Escoto rushed to denounce the late beloved Polish pontiff for “an abuse of authority.” He also declared Fidel Castro a messenger of the Holy Spirit in “the necessity of struggle” to establish “the reign of God on this earth that is the alternative to the empire.”

Last week Rev. Gustavo Gutierrez, the Peruvian who launched liberation theology, was back at the Vatican. He told journalists that the church never condemned his brand of thinking and praised Pope Francis' views on poverty. He didn't mention the sharp drop in Peruvian poverty since policy makers threw out his ideas. Maybe the pope will talk about it on his September trip to Cuba.

—*The Wall Street Journal*, May 18, 2015, p. A11

# The Pope and Raul Castro

by Daniel Henniger

Not everyone gets an hour-long audience with the pope, as Raúl Castro did this past Sunday at the Vatican. But Raúl Castro isn't everyone. Raúl is the president of Cuba and the heir to his brother's half-century-old Communist dictatorship. And right now, Raúl is hot.

Raúl Castro is taking meetings with everyone from President Barack Obama in Panama last month to Pope Francis in Rome last weekend. Then he returned to Havana for a meeting with President François Hollande of France, who flew in to see him and Fidel. How good can it get?

"President" Castro is in some sense an honorific title. When Raúl ran for president of Cuba for the first time in 2008, he was the only candidate. And while the Communist Party isn't the only party in Cuba, the others can't campaign, and political speech is forbidden. One might argue that the Castros' Cuba is the model for how Vladimir Putin has reset the Russian political system.

A beaming, star-struck Mr. Hollande on Monday received a one-hour audience (there is no other word) with the 88-year-old Fidel. The French president said, "I had before me a man who made history."

"Bienvenido!" said Pope Francis to Raúl Sunday when they met at the Vatican. "Welcome!" The Vatican press office didn't release details of the meeting, other than to describe it as "very friendly."

Photographs of the meeting between the president of Cuba's inhabitants and the leader of the world's Catholics suggest they hit it off, with both men aglow in smiles. In fact, Raúl seems to have thought he'd died and gone to heaven. Baptized into Marxism while in college, he announced he might rejoin the Catholic Church. But let Raúl explain his sudden reconversion:

"I read all the speeches of the pope, his commentaries, and if the pope continues this way, I will go back to praying and go back to the church. I'm not joking." Who could doubt it?

When he says, "if the pope continues this way," we assume the Cuban president is referring to Francis' criticisms of capitalism, as when he wrote in 2013: "Some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world." Francis described this theory as an "opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts."

Raúl was so excited after his meeting with the pope Sunday that he said when Francis visits Cuba this September, "I promise to go to all his Masses."

Let us return to earth.

For starters, we posit a hypothetical: Let us assume that instead of being the pope, Francis was just a guy in Cuba named Jorge Mario Bergoglio, living in Havana. If this guy no one had heard of summoned the courage to say something in public as harsh about Castro's communist system as the pope did about capitalism, Raúl would do any number of things to Jorge Mario Bergoglio.

Raúl would have the Cuban police grab him off the street and drive him far outside Havana, where they would beat him up and abandon him. Or they would dump Jorge in prison, where he'd get beaten some more and better not get sick because medical treatment for political dissidents is hard to come by. Or a mob might show up to scream obscenities at him anytime he showed up in public.

Shaming, harassment, and humiliation is what Raúl and Fidel have done to, among many others, the Ladies in White, who are wives of jailed dissidents, and who march in Havana to—of all things—Sunday Mass. What they find on the way to Mass is not fellow communicant Raúl but his mobs or police, which routinely attack them.

We know this because Raúl's brutal *modus operandi* for critics of Cuba's system is described at length in reports by the US State Department and Human Rights Watch. But the Castros' celebrity status with international elites transcends anything they do, and so Cuba is a member of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

Sophisticated opinion holds that Barack Obama's December "opening" to Cuba means the market and tourists will change the place—for example, Raúl's release of 53 political prisoners. According to *Hablemos Press*, which operates inside Cuba, some of those 53 have been rearrested. Other post-"opening" dissidents have been beaten. How come? They tried to meet with an opposition group, Movement for a New Republic.

Last weekend German Chancellor Angela Merkel went to Russia to honor the Russian soldiers who died in World War II. But while in Moscow, Ms. Merkel, who grew up in East Germany, said directly to Vladimir Putin: "I would like also to recall that the end of World War II did not bring democracy and freedom for all of Europe."

Would that one of these men of the world had the guts to say that to Fidel's face in Havana.

—*The Wall Street Journal*, May 14, 2015

# Communist Cuba

by James Kirchick

I've visited more than my fair share of dictatorships, but Cuba is the only one where travelers at the airport must pass through a metal detector upon entering, in addition to leaving, the country. Immediately after clearing customs at José Martí International Airport, visitors line up for a security check. Anyone found carrying contraband—counterrevolutionary books, say, or a spare laptop that might be given to a Cuban citizen—could find himself susceptible to deportation. Contrary to popular conception, traveling to Cuba as an American was not difficult before President Barack Obama's announcement last December of "the most significant changes in our policy in more than 50 years." All anyone had to do was transit through a third country and not disclose his visit to Cuba upon reentering through US customs. It was the aura of the embargo that dissuaded Americans. Moreover, there have long been myriad legal exceptions for Americans to travel to Cuba: They merely had to obtain a license from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) under one of twelve broad, rather vague, permitted categories, such as "educational" and "research." "Tourism" as such was and remains prohibited. But since January, travelers to Cuba need not obtain any OFAC license at all. This essentially means that any American who wants to venture to Cuba, including those who plan to do nothing but sit on the beach all day and dance salsa all night, are now free to do so.

The foremost concern of the 56-year-old Castro junta—the world's oldest continuous regime—is self-perpetuation. Preventing anything that may pose a threat to its continued existence—any material that might germinate the seed of independent thought within an individual Cuban's mind—from making its way onto the island is therefore a priority. In light of the increased number of tourists visiting Cuba since the Obama administration lightened restrictions on American travel, a number that is expected only to grow with time, the Castro regime has had to beef up its capabilities in this field. But judging from the headlines of the Cuban Communist party newspaper, *Granma*, which boasted of the dramatic rise in tourism on a recent cover of its weekly English edition, Havana doesn't seem to mind.

Some four months after President Barack Obama made his announcement, I visited Cuba, wanting to find out what its democratic dissidents had to say about the new winds from Washington. Given the course of American

foreign policy over the past six years, which has seen Washington "reset" relations with a variety of implacably hostile regimes, the proclamation of a new policy toward Cuba was hardly surprising. Obama had signaled his intention to effect such a transformation as early as the 2008 presidential campaign, when he vowed to negotiate directly with a host of American adversaries and declared that "we've been engaged in a failed policy with Cuba for the last 50 years, and we need to change it." Though Cuba-watchers assumed a shift of some sort was coming, the way in which the new policy came about and its list of particulars took many by surprise.

Obama's December 17 declaration followed 18 months of secret negotiations between the president and his Cuban counterpart, Raul Castro, who took the reins of power after his older brother Fidel fell ill in 2008. Even senior State Department officials involved in Latin American affairs were kept in the dark about the negotiations, which were led by Ben Rhodes, a deputy national-security adviser in his mid 20s with no official diplomatic experience but who does possess an MFA in creative writing from New York University. This was the man Obama put in charge of negotiations with Cold War-hardened Cuban Communist apparatchiks, and it shows.

In exchange for the release of Alan Gross, an elderly USAID contractor arrested and accused of espionage in 2009, the United States released the remaining three members of the "Cuban Five," a posse of spies sent to infiltrate the Miami Cuban-exile community in the late 1990s. Washington insisted that Gross was not a spy, and so in order to avoid tying his release to the freeing of the Cuban agents, Havana agrees to deliver a longtime American-intelligence asset it had imprisoned. Gross's release from a prison sentence he ought never to have served in the first palace and that nearly killed him was officially presented as an unrelated act of goodwill.

This swap of prisoners was the only part of Obama's rapprochement in which Havana had to reciprocate, and lopsidedly at that. Moreover, it was just a prelude to the real meat of the Obama announcement: a loosening of the trade and travel restrictions America has imposed on Cuba, a collection of measures enforced through six statutes colloquially known as the "embargo." The relaxed travel policies, the pending opening of embassies, the removal of Cuba from the State Department's list of terrorism sponsors, the restoration of limited economic activity—all longtime goals of the Cuban regime—were declared without any corresponding demands that Havana change its conduct. Indeed, in his speech announcing

the new Cuba policy, Obama essentially admitted that he would have ushered in these unilateral changes much earlier had it not been for the “obstacle” that the imprisonment of an American citizen presented to his grand plans. To fend off accusations that it was giving away something for nothing, the administration claimed that the regime would release 53 political prisoners identified on a State Department list. In January, after weeks of saying it would not publicize the list, State provided the names to select members of Congress, revealing that some of the individuals had been freed before December 17, others were close to finishing their sentences, and a few had already been rearrested. Indeed, in Cuba, as in all authoritarian societies, the door to prison is a revolving one. In March, 610 people were arrested on political charges.

Not only were American diplomats with expertise in the region excluded from the negotiations (the better to prevent them from leaking against a policy shift some of them might have considered ill advised), so were many of the island’s political dissidents and independent journalists. “I can’t understand why they didn’t ask for preconditions,” Antonio Rodiles says of American’s negotiating posture.

I spoke with the American-educated political activist at his home. As with most of the meetings I had with dissidents, I showed up at his front door unannounced in the evening. Planning appointments in advance is logistically difficult and inadvisable security-wise. Internet access is extremely limited (Cuba has the lowest ratio of computers to inhabitants in the Western hemisphere) and is available almost exclusively in hotels and embassies. At a price of about \$4.50 per hour it is far beyond the means of most Cubans. Arranging meetings beforehand by phone, meanwhile, attracts the attention of the security police, who are presumed to listen to everything. Rodiles did not seem at all surprised that an American journalist would visit him at 10 P.M.; late-night knocks on the door (from foreign well-wishers or worse) seem to be a regular occurrence.

It’s not only the Cuban security services that monitor dissidents; nearly all of Cuban society is primed to serve as the regime’s eyes and ears through the proliferation of local Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. Established by Castro in 1960 shortly after he took power, they are dubbed the “civil rearguard for the vanguard of the militias . . . in the struggle against the internal and external enemy.” Combining elements of both the Gestapo and the Stasi (children are encouraged to report on their parents if they see anything suspicious, and neighbors are expected to rat out friends who might be planning an escape), CDRs exist on literally every block across the

country (over 8 million of Cuba’s 11 million citizens are members) and monitor the activities of each and every individual in a neighborhood. The CDR emblem could not be more blatant: a cartoon Cyclops with a giant eye raising a sword above his head. Initially, Castro praised his *crederistas*, as committee members are known, as “1 million gags” for their ability to silence regime opponents, who, he ritually describes as subhuman. “It is impossible that the worms and parasites can make their moves if, on their own, the people . . . keep an eye on them,” he has declared. One sees CDR signs on all types of buildings across the country.

Cuban dissidents are used to receiving guests and know that they’re being watched, and I was generously welcomed by the Cubans I met. The one exception was a young activist who was obviously afraid when I showed up at his door on the Sunday evening. He politely made it clear that he wished for me to leave his home immediately. He had somewhere to be, he said, as assertion that, judging by my finding him shirtless on the couch watching television, was highly unlikely. But it was his home I had entered, and his life he was risking, and so I didn’t protest.

Rodiles studied physics and mathematics at Florida State University in Tallahassee yet ultimately decided to return to his homeland to fight for democracy. He is the main coordinator of a civil-society group composed of writers, artists, and other professionals called “Citizen Demand for Another Cuba,” aimed at persuading the Cuban government to ratify a series of United Nations covenants on human rights. “They just started negotiating,” he says of the American government in a bewildered tone. “They didn’t involved the Cubans from outside or here inside, and I didn’t understand why they did it that way. If they really want a change they’re going to see that nothing’s going to change.”

Rodiles takes inspiration from the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which inspired the Charter 77 movement in Czechoslovakia and other human-rights groups to form behind the Iron Curtain. That accord, at least officially, committed the Soviet Union and its satellites to respect human rights, and it provided dissidents such as Vaclav Havel and Lech Walesa a public benchmark by which to hold the Communist regimes to account. Genuine political change in Cuba would require constitutional reform, as the Cuban constitution permits individual freedom only insofar as such liberties don’t threaten the Communist party as “the superior leading force of society and of the state.” Wilfredo Vallin, a leader of the non-governmental Cuban Law Association, told me that, “if Cuba ratifies the pacts it would be forced to change its constitution. Rodiles



despairs that there will be no such American pressure put upon normalization at all costs. Restoring full diplomatic ties with Havana has come to be a legacy project for the president, who views it as his duty to right America's many perceived wrongs. "The Obama administration already has an agenda, and they don't want to change," Rodiles sighs. "They got advice from some people that they think the better way is to, in some way, legitimize the totalitarian system."

In light of his own predicament, Rodiles is right to be suspicious of the administration's tactics. Less than two weeks after Obama triumphantly announced a new chapter in America's relationship with Cuba, Rodiles was arrested steps from his front door on the way to a free-speech demonstration in central Havana. A high wall surrounds his home, but it's not high enough to block the two cameras posted on telephone poles across the street that he says monitor his house 24/7.

I ask Rodiles how his campaign is progressing, and he says that about 2,000 people have thus far signed a petition to the government insisting upon its ratification of international human-rights agreements. It's a relatively small number for a country with some 11 million inhabitants, though Charter 77, it should be noted, had only 242 initial signatories, in a country that was a few million people larger. Simply signing such a document immediately brings one under suspicion; it is an act requiring remarkable courage.

One of the most courageous people I met on the island was Berta Soler, leader of the Ladies in White. Formed in 2003, Damas de Blanco, as it is known in Spanish, is a coalition of wives, sisters, daughters, and other female relatives of imprisoned political dissidents. Their protests are regularly met with violence by regime-backed mobs, which drag the women by their hair through the streets. (The regime exports this sort of thuggery; at last month's Summit of the Americas in Panama, a horde of Castro supporters descended on a group of Cuban non-governmental activists beating them to the point that Panamanian police had to intervene.) The organization's founder, Laura Pollan, created the group after her husband, a leader of the outlawed Cuban Liberal party, was arrested during the 2003 crackdown known as the "Black Spring." Pollan died under mysterious circumstances in 2011, the famed Cuban health-care system having failed first to accurately diagnose her dengue fever and then to provide her adequate care.

Like many of the Cubans I meet, Soler takes great pride in making the most of what little she owns: Her tiny flat is decorated with plants and various other tchotchkes. A framed photograph of her meeting with Pope Francis outside St. Peter's Basilica graces the wall; her dog nips at my feet. A vivacious Afro-Cuban, Soler lives in a decrepit, concrete housing block, part of an expanse of apartments

on the outer reaches of Havana so vast that neighborhoods are divided by "zone" numbers. The crumbling scenery stretches in all directions, bleak and limitless, like a setting for one of J.G. Ballard's dystopian short stories.

One way to think of Cuba is a giant public-housing project. A place where everyone is a ward of the state, and where private enterprise is next to nonexistent, the country breeds similar social pathologies. Walking through the outskirts of Havana and other unfashionable places where tourists rarely tread, one sees a great number of aimless people without any sort of vocation. They just hang out. "Cubans don't go to work to produce but to sustain," Soler says. This is not an indictment of the individual Cuban, who would work were meaningful work available, but of a regime that wants to keep its people listless.

"The government sells a lot of alcohol to occupy the minds of the people," Soler tells me, an observation that makes a lot of sense once you've spent a few days in Cuba. Alcohol is plentiful and cheap. In the poor provincial city of Pinar del Rio, about a two-hour drive west of Havana, I saw a boy no older than 13 walking the streets with a half-empty bottle of beer. A discotheque there was, on a Saturday night, full of people ranging in age from mid teens to 40s; a bottle of Havana Club sets you back \$6. Subsidizing the production of cheap alcohol so as to keep the population inebriated (and therefore distracted) is one of many tools that the Cuban regime learned from its erstwhile Soviet benefactor. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev drastically cut production of vodka, increased its cost, and prohibited the sale of it before lunchtime. Some historians have speculated that reducing alcohol consumption, a cushion to dull the pain of everyday life, led Russians to more quickly understand the misery of their plight, unintentionally accelerating the Soviet Union's demise.

Like Rodiles, Soler is highly critical of the Obama administration's caving in to the Castros. "Every deal should be conditioned. America has to put conditions. If you are giving, you have to receive, and for the moment the American government is receiving nothing," she says. Soler says that there has been no letup in the harassment of dissidents; regime agents smeared one member of her group with tar at a peaceful protest held in February. "We are in the same position or even worse," she thinks, as the Obama administration steamrolls forward with its normalization plans while asking for nothing in return.

Supporters of restoring relations with Cuba insist that, in the long run, it will prove detrimental to the Castro regime by opening up the country to Western influences and economic investment. This has long been the point made by liberals, libertarians, and even some conservative opponents of the embargo, who, unlike many leftist opponents of longstanding American Cuba policy, harbor no sympathy for the regime. But when I ask Soler whether increased American investment and more visitors will help

people such as herself, she is adamant in her response. Lifting the embargo in exchange for concrete reforms like legalizing independent media and ending restrictions on free speech would make sense, she avers. But lifting it without such conditions, she tells me, is “beneficial to the government, not the Cuban citizens. Money is coming in and it’s going straight to the government. Regular Cubans don’t touch it.”

In his speech announcing the policy shift, President Obama declared that, “through a policy of engagement, we can more effectively stand up for our values and help the Cuban people help themselves as they move into the 21st century.” The impracticality of this assertion does not become fully apparent until one visits Cuba and comes to appreciate how its peculiar economy functions.

The first thing to understand about the Cuban economy is that the government controls nearly all forms of economic activity, with the exception of some black market activities like prostitution. “In Cuba, nobody does business with Cubans. They do business with the Castro family,” says Frank Calzon, executive director of the Washington-based Center for a Free Cuba. Foreign companies do not hire their own workers but are assigned them by the government, which acts as middleman. Furthermore, companies do not pay their workers directly, but rather compensate the government, which decides how much money to dispense to its subjects. The Cuban economic system is essentially one of indentured servitude, with the government loaning out its citizens for massive profit.

In order to prevent ordinary Cubans from acquiring and accumulating capital, the regime has cleverly instituted a two-currency system. One currency, the convertible peso (CUC), is pegged to the dollar and used by tourists to pay for hotels, meals, taxis, and luxury goods available only in special stores inaccessible to regular Cubans. Visiting Cuba, foreigners will never need to come into contact with any currency other than the CUC. Few Cubans, however, receive CUCs. In addition to their ration books—used to acquire a meager amount of staples such as rice and cooking oil—Cubans also receive monthly salaries, averaging \$19 (less than half the cost of living). They are paid in the Cuba peso (CUP, equivalent to about 4 cents. These CUPs can be used to splurge on the occasional extra pair of underwear or to purchase pizza at a food stand. As they are convertible only into CUCs, CUPs are worthless outside the country.

The dual-currency system is the basis of the country’s two-tiered economic structure, dividing Cubans with access to the far more valuable CUCs from those who earn only CUPs. “Those in the peso-only economy are completely dependent on the government, which is in control of more than 85 percent of the total economy,” John Kavulich, president of the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council in New York, told *Bloomberg Busi-*

*nessweek* recently. With these two currencies, and with government ownership of industries as well as of the tourist trade, the regime has ensured that the coming influx of American dollars will fall into its coffers. “The system is cleverly and cynically designed to guarantee the fullest exploitation of every Cuban worker for the benefit of the Castro pocketbook,” says Thor Halvorssen, president of the Human Rights Foundation, which for years has sent small undercover delegations into Cuba with laptops, cell phones, cameras, and other technical equipment to distribute among dissidents and local journalists. (Raul announced in 2013 that the regime will scrap the CUC and make the CUP the country’s sole currency, though it is unclear when, or even if, this reform will happen.)

Though the Castro regime and its defenders like to blame America for its problems, pointing to the embargo as chief culprit, it is not for lack of American investment that Cuba is so poor. Cuba under Castro has always been a client of another, more economically powerful state that is happy to subsidize it for propagandistic or strategic purposes. For decades, that sponsor was the Soviet Union, which initially saw value in Cuba as a military outpost (and irritant of America) 90 miles off Florida’s coast. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba entered a period of sustained economic decline, which lasted until the arrival of Hugo Chavez’s Bolivarian regime in Venezuela. Subsidies (amounting to about 100,000 barrels of oil a day at half the market price) from the oil-rich Venezuelans managed to help Fidel right the ship, but as the collapse in commodity prices and disastrous economic mismanagement have drastically reduced Caracas’s support for its comrades in Havana, the Castro regime has drifted about searching for another patron. Barack Obama could not have arrived at a more opportune time.

The initial charm of Havana is undeniable. To the American, for whom it has long been a forbidden place, the city exudes mythology and mystique. The vintage cars (over whose noisy engines one must shout the destination to drivers), the music of Buena Vista Social Club, an atmosphere evocative of Hemingway, women singing in the streets to sell their wares—all these cultural touchstones combine to make a heady experience. Foreign tourists rave about the city’s rustic and “authentic” atmosphere, laud the salsa dancing, and gawk at the 1950s Mercury Sun Valleys that clog the roads (for some reason, the plethora of Soviet-era Ladas don’t make it into the colorful photo albums extolling Cuba’s retro urban cool). Few visitors bother to visit an actual Cuban home, and so you won’t hear them coo about the “classic” 1950s-era refrigerators—that is, if the house is lucky enough to have one. Aside from a few carefully well-preserved plazas outside the main tourist hotels, Havana is much dirtier and more run down than I imagined. Walking down its narrow streets, I was reminded of bombed-out sections of Bei-

rut, heaps of rubble and trash strewn about the decaying buildings. Steps from a billboard splayed with Castro's visage and some revolutionary verbiage, a woman picked through garbage. At a pharmacy, I watched a man purchase Band-Aids—individually, not by the package.

"Sometimes when you have money you want to go to the market and buy meat and there's nothing there," Berta Soler told me. "If you're able to find it, it's bad quality. We wake up every day thinking, 'What am I going to eat today?' and go to sleep thinking 'What am I going to eat tomorrow?'" I dined at a variety of Cuban establishments, from the restaurant of a moderately priced tourist hotel to a relatively upmarket café to a canteen in a small, extremely poor provincial city. Across the board, the quality of food was horrendous, and never before have I been more eager to consume airplane cuisine.

Experiencing socialism as pure as it exists in the contemporary world, one finds something vile about the tendency of so many First World leftists, out of a perverse belief that there exists a thrilling nobility in involuntary (as opposed to deliberate) poverty, to romanticize Cuba. For a state that claims to be classless, Cuba ironically has a highly stratified class system. Cuba's wealthy elite represents a smaller and much richer percentage of the country's population (combined net worth of the Castro brothers: \$900 million) than the elite of a typical developed nation; its poor, consisting of the vast majority, meanwhile, are much more destitute.

"Socially responsible tourism" has long been a fashionable concern. There are countless travel website and guidebooks devoted to the concept, which urge explorers to be eco-friendly, patronize local business rather than international hotel chains, and generally try to leave the destination better than they found it. This altruistic pursuit is next to impossible in Cuba, ironically one of the most popular pilgrimage destinations for the progressive traveler. My first two nights in Havana, I stayed at a *casa particular*, a private home whose owner has been permitted to rent out extra rooms to tourists. The landlady, a former Russian teacher, related how the government imposes a huge monthly tax consisting of a percentage of her earnings in addition to a levy that is fixed regardless of how many guests she hosts.

Aside from the meager number of CUCs that operators of *casas particulares* get to keep, as well as the occasional tips accumulated by hotel bellboys and the like, practically all of the money that foreign tourists spend in Cuba winds up in the pockets of the regime. The government owns outright most of the hotels and maintains at least a 51 percent stake in resorts that are nominally the property of major foreign chains. Taxi drivers are obliged to turn over a fixed amount of cash to the government every month, as are the seemingly independent mom-'n'-pop

dining establishments. "When you see a private business and you see it's prosperous, they have some relationship with people from the elite," Rodiles explains to me. "Without, it's impossible." Socially responsible tourism to Cuba is not only a chimera but a perversion of the concept.

The Cuban embargo is not a hardship for the ordinary Cuban. It is, at most, an inconvenience for American travelers to Cuba, who cannot use their credit or ATM cards in the country and must therefore prepare for their visit by making all of their arrangements in advance over the Internet and also bring a large amount of cash (preferably euros). This was a lesson I learned the hard way, forcing me to ration the relatively small amount of cash I brought to the island. The administration has said that it will ease restrictions on American financial institutions operating in Cuba, which will make things more convenient for American travelers and allow them to spend money on the island more easily. But few Cubans will ever see that cash.

That American policy toward Cuba over the past half century has "failed" is a widely held assumption. It is accurate, however, only insofar as "success" is characterized by the transformation of Cuba into a liberal democracy. (By this standard, why is not the rest of the world's policy toward Cuba—which consists of treating it like any other country—also judged a "failure"?) Proponents of engagement laud Raul Castro's easing of travel restrictions, slight opening of the economy, and other reforms instituted since he took power in 2008, but they never acknowledge the possibility that all of the American pressure and isolation leading up to that point might have had something to do with the changes.

To be sure, not all of Cuba's democratic dissidents oppose the Obama administration's opening. "[The embargo] is only helpful for the government," Roberto de Jesus Guerra Perez, co-founder of a small, independent news agency called Hablemos (Let's Talk) Press, tells me. Perez gathers information from correspondents across the country and regularly uploads it onto the agency's website during the two-hour daily timeslot he's allotted by the regime to use a foreign embassy's Internet connection. His colleagues occasionally distribute printed newsletters; two of them served jail terms for passing out samizdat literature. Yet Perez's wife, Margaly, a member of the Ladies in White, disagrees with her husband, noting that such division of opinion is common in dissident households. This, in itself, is a testament to the vitality of the civil, democratic debate that already exists among Cuba's independent thinkers.

The embargo (long falsely referred to as a "blockade" by the Cuban regime and its Western sycophants) has been portrayed as the tool of ruthless, embittered Cuban exiles. The "right-wing Miami Cubans" of lore, whose "right-wing" views include support for multi-party democracy, freedom of speech, and an end to the statist economic system in

which a family-cum-military syndicate owns practically everything, allegedly have, out of vindictiveness, inflicted the embargo upon those benighted Cubans who stayed behind. But that's not the way the dissidents I met see the situation. "The problem that Cuba has had isn't the embargo," Soler tells me. "It's the system that's not working. Fidel and Raul just sold a story that's not true, internationally and domestically."

The outsize role America plays in the Cuban popular imagination is apparent in its embassy, which is unique in ways other than that it is officially called an "interests section," denoting the lack of official diplomatic relations. Most of the foreign legations in Havana are located in Miramar, a tony area several kilometers from the capital's center. There, the embassies are housed in giant villas that belonged to the elite who ruled in the era of dictator Fulgencio Batista. The American interests section, however, is a heavily guarded compound on the Malecon, the stone embankment abutting the strip of road along the Caribbean Sea. And unlike the old mansions of Havana's Miramar district, it consists of a seven-story, non-descript office tower. In 2006, in an inspired bit of diplomacy that today cynics might refer to as "trolling," the Bush administration erected a Times Square-style ticker visible across 25 windows on the top floor and displaying blunt, pro-democracy messages in bright red letters. Its components smuggled into Cuba via diplomatic pouch, the makeshift display flashed quotes ranging from the anodyne ("Democracy in Cuba") to the mildly provocative (Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up").

This obviously annoyed the regime, and in response, it erected 138 poles topped with black flags to obstruct the ticker's visibility (Castro also ordered the parking lot of the interests section be dug up). The poles were installed at the end of the Jose Marti Anti-Imperialist Platform, a plaza directly outside the interests section consisting of a stage and large concrete slabs on which are pointed the ubiquitous revolutionary buzzphrases "*Patria o Muerte*" ("Homeland or death") and "*Venceremos*" ("We Shall Overcome"). Fifteen years ago, in the midst of the Elian Gonzalez affair, the Cuban government erected a statue of Marti—a leader of the movement seeking Cuba's independence from Spain—clutching a small child (meant to be Gonzalez) while pointing his finger accusatorily at the American building. Over the years, whenever the Cuban regime has wanted to gin up anger at the United States, it has bused tens of thousands of supporters to the Anti-Imperialist Platform, where they can spit venom at the building Fidel has called a "nest of spies."

In 2009, several months after Obama assumed office, the State Department removed the ticker, deeming it confrontational. It was a sign of things to come. Today, the heavily fortified interests section and the vast plaza outside are no longer the sites of dueling slogans, the respective

physical representations of American democratic freedoms and Cuban Communist obfuscations. The administration's decision to abandon its predecessor's robust, it piquant, provocation can be seen as a metaphor for the broader policy changes it has implemented over the past four months, deserting the island's democrats in pursuit of a no-conditions deal with their oppressors. While the rest of the world—with a few noble exceptions, such as Poland and the Czech Republic, ex-Communist countries that reversed their pro-Castro policies almost immediately after the Cold War transitions and began providing vigorous support to the dissidents—has accepted the regime and resigned itself to its perpetuation, America long stood as the most outspoken supporter of democracy in Cuba.

Changes to another edifice also signal something ominous about politics on the island. On my first day in Havana, I walked past El Capitolio, the pre-revolutionary parliament modeled on the US Capitol. Early in his rule, Castro found that he didn't have much use for the building ("true democracy" would be expressed through voting by a show of hands in the city's Plaza de la Revolucion), and so it was converted into the Cuban Academy of Sciences. El Capitolio is set to reopen later this year, once again serving as a legislative body, housing the rubber-stamp, single-party National Assembly. Walking past, I noticed that the building's exterior granite walls were halfway through a resurfacing, an overhaul well timed for the huge number of American tourists expected to descend upon the island over the coming year. When it's finished, the regime will have put a gleaming new façade on its artificial house of representatives.

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