

Irish Examiner

# Collins letter fetches €28,000

by Seán McCárthaigh

A RARE political letter written by Michael Collins has fetched a record price of €28,000 at an auction in Dublin.

Despite fierce bidding by the National Library, the letter went to singer Enya's manager Mickey Ryan in an auction held at James Adam's showrooms on Dublin's Stephen's Green last night.

Mr Ryan said he wanted the letter to remain in Ireland.

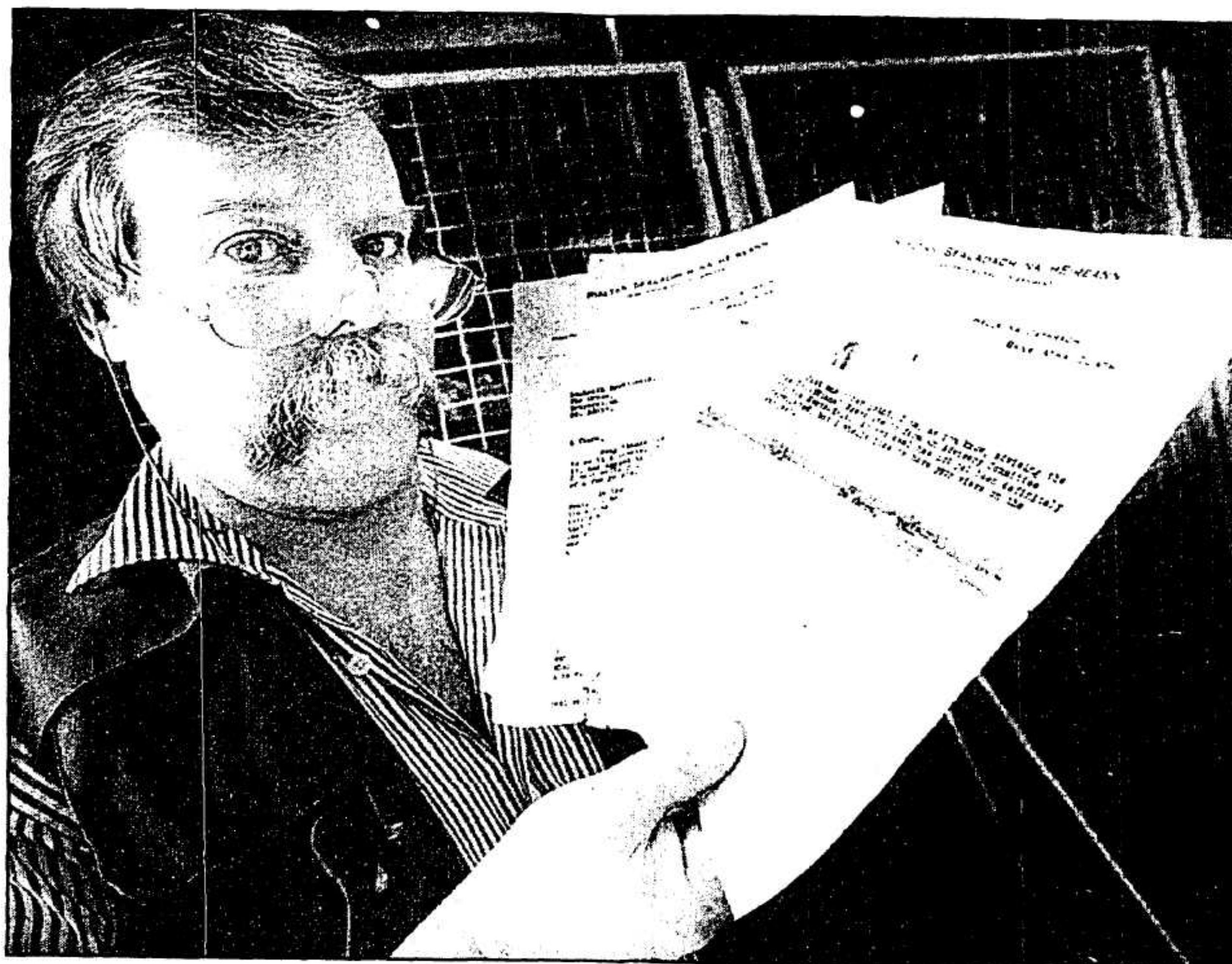
The final price of €28,000 was four times higher than the previous record for a Michael Collins letter and far exceeded the guide price of €8,000.

"It really was knockout stuff. The phone bidders didn't even get a look in," said auction catalogue Peter Sheen. "The National Library fought all the way and kept knocking out bidders but in the end the letter went to a private bidder for €1,000 more at €22,000."

Additional charges brought the final selling price of the Collins letter to €28,000. It is one of the few political letters by the assassinated leader known to be in existence.

The letter, dated February 7, 1922, was sent to a leading Derry-based republican Louis J. Walsh a month after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty to reassure Northern nationalists that they wouldn't be abandoned following the establishment of the Border.

"I must confess, however, that I



Cataloguer Peter Sheen holds Collins' letter, which sold for €28,000 last night.

Picture: Marc O'Sullivan

am no lover of partition, no matter in what form it appears. Any kind of even temporary partition is distasteful to me," wrote Collins.

The three-page letter on Irish Provisional Government-headed notepaper is in remarkably good condition given that it was stored in a wallet for over three decades.

In the letter, Collins also outlines his position to Walsh on negotiations held in London and how he believed he had outwitted the unionist leader James Craig.

It is the first time the historical document, signed "Micheál O Coileáin", has been made available

for sale by public auction. Its owner, an unidentified Northern Ireland collector, had acquired it privately several years ago.

According to James Adam, interest in the document from private collectors and institutions at home and abroad was phenomenal.

In the past week, the company received numerous queries from buyers in Britain, the US and Australia, as well as Ireland.

The National Library also bid heavily for the document, despite the fact that its purchasing power has been restricted following the €12.6m it spent on acquiring trans-

cripts by James Joyce last year.

"Letters like this are incredibly rare as all the official archives which would have contained correspondence from Collins were destroyed. All that survived are his love letters to Kitty Kiernan, which were largely non-political," said Mr Sheen.

He said interest in Collins memorabilia was currently "red-hot".

"Items associated with Collins attract more interest than all other major Irish political figures of the 20th century put together. If we had a letter from Collins complaining about how his suit was cut it would fetch €3,000 to €4,000,"

# Politicians to get €1.6m for giving up council seats

by Fionnán Sheahan  
Political Reporter

DÁIL members and senators will get a €1.6m sweetener from the taxpayers this summer to give up their local authority seats. The 127 members of the Oireachtas who are also members of a local authority will be paid €12,800 each for handing over their council seats later this year.

Under existing regulations, retiring councillors get a retirement package of €7,800 if they do not run again in 2004.

Environment Minister Martin Cullen is also giving them another €5,000 for giving up their council seats between May 4 and June 30 and said it was a reasonable sum.

He also said yesterday he was in favour of, ultimately, paying local authority members full-time salaries to do a full-time job. At present, councillors are paid a stipend of €11,000 a year plus expenses.

The Local Government Bill published yesterday also scraps the plans to directly elect mayors of county and city councils. The constitutionality of the bill was sound, Minister Cullen said, despite threats to challenge the law in the courts.

Yet, the bill was slated by opposition parties for being cowardly.

Fine Gael said the legislation was disappointing and should have been part of a major local government reform package.

The Labour Party said the minister must ensure TDs and senators can get full information on the activities of local authorities.

FG environment spokesman Bernard Allen said that, instead of strengthening the role of local authority members, councillors' powers are being eroded, as the

Government takes away the right to refuse collection charges.

Expressing concern about Oireachtas members' abilities to get information from council officials on local matters, Deputy Allen said rules needed to be laid down.

"Statutory regulations, not guidelines, are needed to direct local authorities on how they conduct their business with Oireachtas members. These regulations should have been published with the Bill. Without them, Oireachtas members supporting the Bill are buying a pig in a poke," he said.

The U-turn on the directly-elected mayors proposal was cowardly, Deputy Allen said.

"The Government is obviously afraid to face the electorate in such elections, as its candidates would undoubtedly suffer because of the Government's deception and the countless promises broken since the last general election campaign," he said.

Labour environment spokesman Eamon Gilmore said Fianna Fáil was running away from the electorate.

"When the Local Government Act 2001 was passed, which provides for the direct elections, Fianna Fáil was running high in the opinion polls and thought that they could do no wrong. They believed that this provision would allow them to secure the election of a Fianna Fáil mayor or chairperson in virtually every local authority."

"But now they are languishing at their lowest level in the polls for many years. Fianna Fáil fear the wrath of the people over the litany of broken promises and have moved to rob the people of the chance to directly elect people to these key positions in local government," he said.

# Low income families 'linger in inferior housing'

by John Breslin

TENS of thousands of low income families are at risk of being left indefinitely in sub-standard and insecure housing, it has been claimed.

Focus Ireland warned if housing provision is concentrated on making houses affordable for middle income families, people on low incomes will be further marginalised.

Dáithí Downey, a policy analyst with Focus Ireland, told a housing conference in Kildare: "Government policy decisions that maintain bias and partiality toward home-ownership at the expense of social housing need to be revisited."

He claimed that 85% of the nearly 50,000 households on the housing waiting list have an income of less than €15,000 and that 67% of them earned less than €10,000.

Thousands of families are often stuck living in insecure and low-standard accommodation for years at an end until the State provides them with housing, said Mr Downey. He said the focus has to be more on how to house people on low incomes than on making homes affordable for those on middle incomes.

Recent cuts will see reduced capital spending on social housing leading to an even greater fall-off in social housing provision, said Mr Downey.

"There also needs to be urgent investment in a full

range of quality emergency and permanent accommodation for the at least 6,000 people who are homeless in Ireland," he added.

At the conference, a joint research paper, Housing Access for All, was launched. The research was carried out by Focus, Simon Communities of Ireland, St Vincent de Paul and Threshold and examined 33 local housing strategies and 20 homeless action plans available as of June 2002.

Focus research expert, Clare Hickey, said the report found many of the housing strategies took the 20% provision of the 2000 Planning Act (Part V) as merely a subsidised route into home ownership for middle-income families. The section rules that 20% of developments be set aside for social and/or affordable housing.

"We believe that Part V, which enables local authorities to require up to 20% of eligible developments be allocated to affordable housing, should be retained."

"However, it needs to be reshaped to ensure it targets those most in need on a social basis and not simply providing housing on an affordability basis."

"It is essential that provision under Part V should be based on a careful assessment of social need rather than on estimates of unaffordability alone. Where levels of social need are particularly acute, a majority, if not all, of the 20% should be used for social housing."

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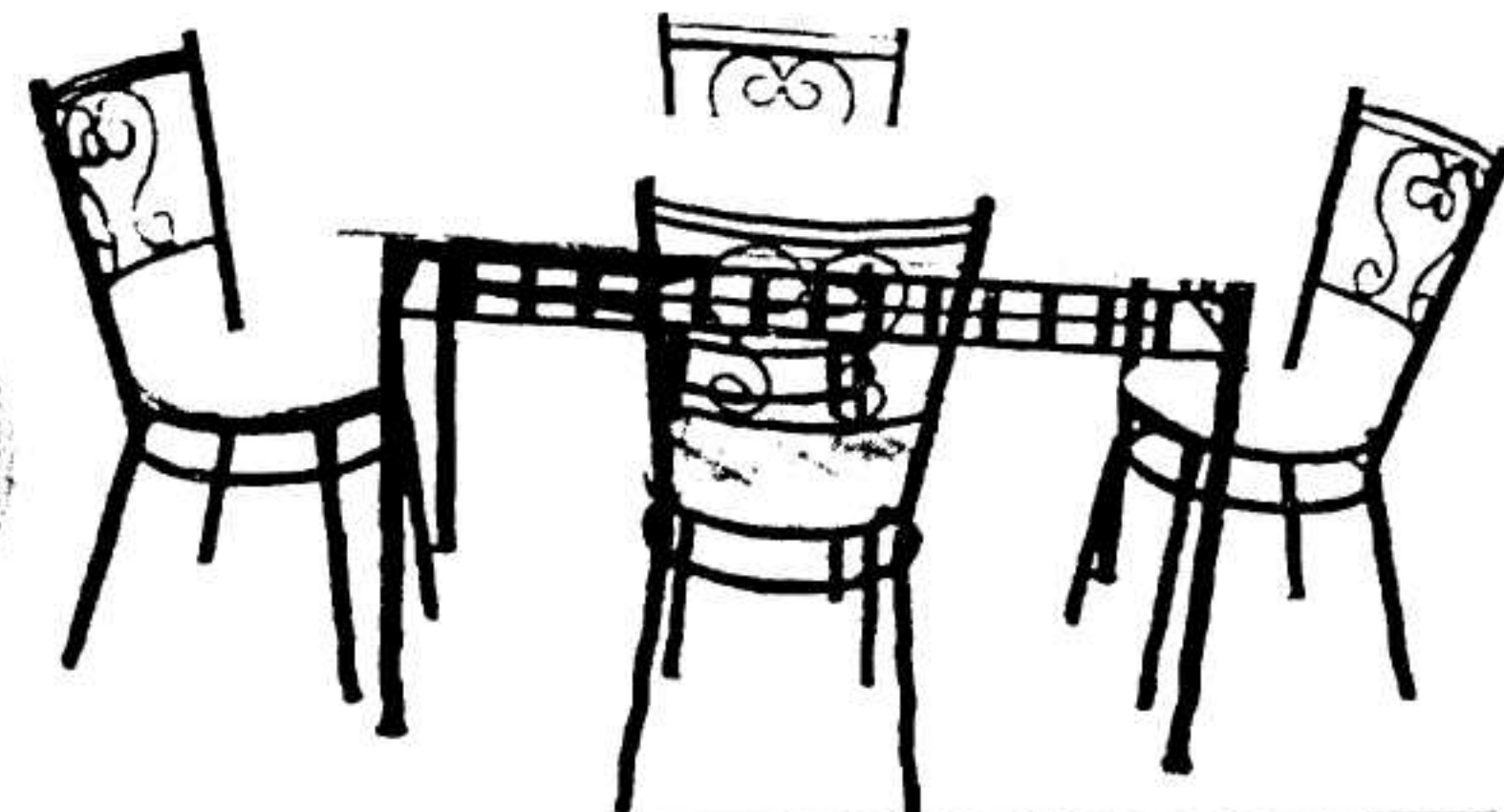


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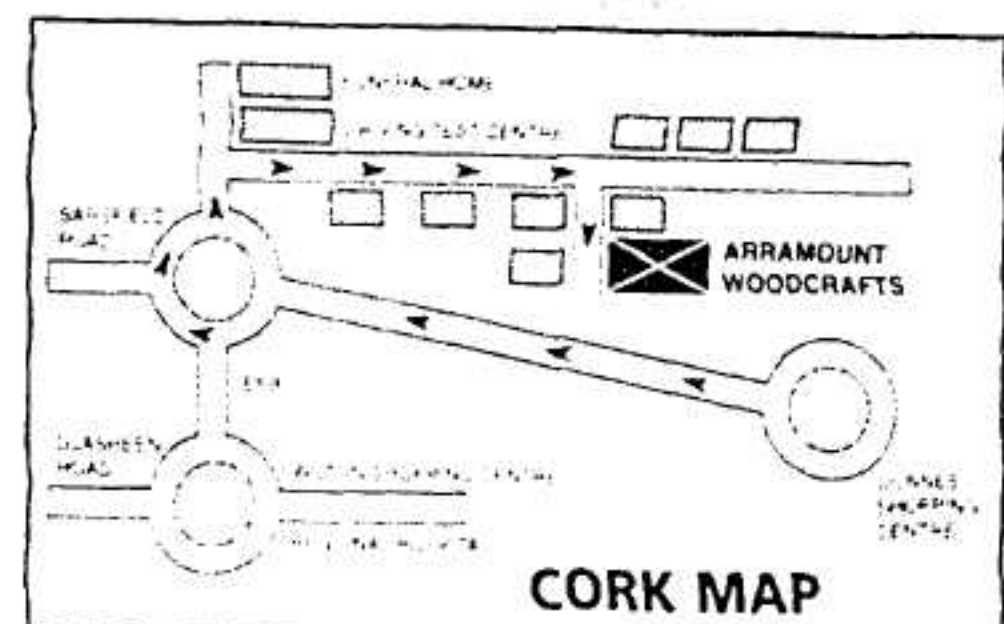
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