

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

March 30th, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott respond to a listener's question about the US role in NATO and the nature of US imperialism. In the interview segment, ER discusses the betterment of public schools with Roy E. Larsen, president of Time, Inc. In the closing segment, a clip is played from ER's television show, *The Prospects of Mankind*, in which ER and a Michael DiSalle, director of the Office of Price Stabilization, answer a question regarding food prices.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Roy E. Larsen, Michael Nathan, Mr. DiSalle

[ER:] How do you do? This is Eleanor Roosevelt. Every Monday through Friday my son Elliott and I have the opportunity to visit with you here in my living room at the Park Sheraton Hotel in New York City. Each day it is our desire to bring interesting guests that we are hopeful you will enjoy meeting. Elliott, will you tell our listeners today's plans?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Thank you Mother. Mr. Roy E. Larsen, president of Time Incorporated is Mrs. Roosevelt's guest today. There are a couple of things a great many of our listeners share with Mr. Larsen. One of course is an enthusiastic interest in Time Inc. and the magazines published by that organization. The other is a deep concern about public schooling for the country's youngsters. Mr. Larsen's concern has resulted in some very definite action. And he'll tell you about it a little later on during the interview. First though, let's hear what's in the mail today and also have a message from the sponsors who makes this recorded program possible.

[Break: 1:08- 1:21]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Our subject for discussion today, Mother, comes from Mrs. Roberta Gill of Philadelphia. She asks, "Do you think the United States was preemptory in having both army and navy supreme Atlantic commanders under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization instead of allowing Great Britain to have the navy command?"

[ER:] I really don't know. Um I think it was natural for the British to want the navy command because of their traditional feeling uh about their navy. But apparently the government of Great Britain they uh had made no request of this kind and is explaining that they felt it was better for both commands to be uh in the hands of Americans. Now um I can quite understand that Mr. Churchill voiced a feeling of a great many people in Great Britain um but uh there must be a reason for this and um -I would uh be rather neutral on this I think I haven't any very great feelings one way or the other about it. [ER laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, don't you think though that u- uh from the standpoint of the successful operation of uh the North Atlantic Treaty nations that the United States should bend over backwards to ensure that we do not try to uh just take over and run the whole show? Because then we're going to open ourselves just as sure as fate to a charge which will find a lot of-of sympathy in these countries which will probably be made by the Soviet Union--that we're an imperialistic nation and we're now going to dominate the military machines of all the North Atlantic uh pact of nations and that our next step will be that we'll move in and control their economy and then that we will move in and control all of the people.

[ER:] Yes, I think that is true and I think that there's something else which perhaps is even more important, namely that where you carry responsibility uh you take a greater interest and that in all

probability the more responsibility we can give to the other Atlantic pact nations um the more real participation on their part we will get and in this country we complain rather bitterly eh that they do not participate as fully as we would like to see them do. Well, um if we want to improve that participation uh we should give more responsibility eh and--but in this specific instance I don't understand it and I don't know enough about it. I would want to know [ER coughs] whether it was General Eisenhower's request, whether [ER coughs] whether not just the British government acquiesced but their military people acquiesced, whether it was a joint chief of staff decision and um--after all these decisions are not solely arrived at by General Eisenhower. He has a joint staff representing all the Atlantic Pact nations and I would want to know whether it was arrived at as a joint proposition and there are a lot of questions in my mind about it and I don't feel capable of making a decision--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well some of those questions I think might deserve a little airing uh in order that the wrong impression shouldn't get around and in order that people should--shouldn't be too hasty making up their minds. For instance, uh it is entirely possible that Great Britain does not have the bulk of her naval command in the Atlantic Ocean uh and serving in the support of the Atlantic treaty uh countries. [ER: Yes entirely right--] And that the United States has the great bulk of its forces in that position. Uh in that event it may be that because of the use of -- such widespread use of American equipment and American ships that they felt that an American tactical commander was better to use in this instance, now I don't know whether that's true-- (6:09)

[ER:] No, that-that is the only reason that um I could think of for --for this particular decision because naturally the other nations involved have no-no large navies and therefore it would have to be either a British or an American and if the major um British force is scattered in other parts of the world, uh it might well be that that was the reason but this is something I think that we must learn to get the joint services um reasons for and not to go off the handle uh until we get some facts. Now I wish very much our powers that be would get into the habit of giving us the facts before we get in the newspaper a statement or something without any explanation and this was a statement without explanation, but I um-I don't myself um feel that I know enough about this to-to answer that question. I'm perfectly willing to try to find out--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well I-I would like every much to have a clarification for instance of um uh how these appointments are brought about. For instance, now that General Eisenhower has been selected by all of the nation's uh as the supreme commander in the--of the Atlantic pact countries' military [ER: And has chosen--] joint effort. [ER: General Montgomery I ga-[unclear]--] as his land commander [ER: Yes]. Now uh I would like to know whether-- if-if he has uh arrived at these decisions uh did he have to put it up to the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Great Britain, in Holland, and Belgium, and France to get ratification and approval?

[ER:] Well I imagine, don't you, that he has representatives from all those nations in a-a staff [unclear]--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes but would you have to get the military--the government of each one of these countries to ok every one of your staff appointments?

[ER:] No, I should say that each government probably, and I don't know this I wish I did--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well I'd like to find this out.

[ER:] But I should say that probably each government had a representative--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Serving on his staff.

[ER:] In--serving on his staff, and that they were responsible before they took a definite stand to ascertain that it was acceptable uh to their governments and that that was the way it was integrated, but I may be wrong about that. (8:59)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well it's a very interesting question and uh its seems to me that uh by [ER: How it's run should be made clearer.] Mr. Churchill's having arisen in the--on the floor of the House of Commons in--and uh challenged uh the prime minister who quite evidently--Mr. Attlee was quite evidently aware of the appointment but was unprepared to know why the appointment was made at the time that he tried to answer Mr. Churchill. So I think that uh Mr. Churchill in order not to mislead the people of all the Atlantic Pact countries and to try to throw a red herring which may have had very good reasoning behind it, the appointment and uh maybe Mr. Churchill would have agreed with it. Uh if he had been aware of the facts--that it was incumbent upon him before making a charge on the floor of the House of Commons to have checked into all of the reasons in back of the appointment.

[ER:] Uh, it's incumbent upon all of us I suppose always to do that. We don't always do it because as frequently we feel very strongly about something and we react on a feeling. Now, Mr. Churchill has an extremely strong feeling about the British navy [Elliott Roosevelt: Ah, yes.] and I'm quite sure he reacted on feeling and not on knowledge of just what the reason was and I can't blame him for the feeling particularly [ER laughs] because I know his background on the navy--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh yes, in fact didn't Father refer to him and his dispatches as the naval person? That naval person?

[ER:] That former naval person--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Former naval person. Wasn't he uh former uh first lord of [ER: Oh yes, yes.] the admiralty?

[ER:] And um uh so that I-I really think that uh perhaps it's incumbent on--on us to find out and to really ask that we get some information uh from people in authority as to how this whole thing functions. We don't know yet, I don't know and I'm sure many other people don't know.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well then uh-uh I suppose you want me to write to the authorities and get all the information that I can. [ER: I think that would be a very good idea.] so that you can talk about it.

[ER:] Yes, very good idea.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright well I guess that that's as far as we can go in our ignorant state at the present time in answering the--this question from Mrs. Roberta Gill of Philadelphia.

[Break: 11:32-11:55]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] As we all know uh the public schools of the United States today face grave problems. The thing that perhaps few of us realize however is that something is being done about it. With Mrs. Roosevelt today is a gentleman who, as chairman of the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools, is in a very good position to tell us of the work being done towards better schools. Mother will you take over and introduce your guest for today?

[ER:] With great pleasure, Elliott. Mr. Roy E. Larson, my guest today, is probably better known as the president of Time Incorporated than as an authority on the problems of public education. But these

problems are of deep concern to him. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Mr. Roy E. Larsen.
(12:50)

[Roy Larsen:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt and I would like to say how much I appreciate this opportunity to talk about some of these school problems.

[ER:] That's very kind of you. Well Mr. Larsen, what are some of the major problems in the public schools today?

[Roy Larsen:] Well I think perhaps our chief problem is the lack of balance between supply and demand. In other words we have more pupils than we have proper facilities or sufficient qualified teachers to take care of them. And as we look ahead we see that that condition is going to be aggravated by the tremendous number of youngsters of pre-school age now that the schools have got to take care of in the years ahead.

[ER:] Well what is the National Citizens Commission for Public Schools and what is its purpose? I gather that its doing some thinking on these subjects.

[Roy Larsen:] That's right. Well, the National Citizens Commission for Public Schools is a group of thirty-five laymen from all different kinds of activities and parts of the country who came together some three years ago to see what they could do to arouse more interest on the part of more people in these school problems, [Roy Larsen clears throat] especially in their local communities.

[ER:] Well now what do you um--to go back a little to the first um difficulty um--why do you think we are short of teachers, and um what ma--what lies at the base of our difficulties?

[Roy Larsen:] As regards to the teachers? [ER: Yes, as to the teachers.] Well I think it--perhaps the same lack of interest on the part of the people generally about our schools which has caused the teacher as an important person in our society to be lost sight of. I think she um--the conditions um have-have not attracted enough teachers, enough youngsters into the teaching profession um and with the growing enrollments the um the shortage is becoming more and more apparent, in--especially in the elementary schools.

[ER:] Is it salaries you think?

[Roy Larsen:] I think salaries have had a great deal to do with it. Now as you know, since the end of the World War II a great deal has been done in bringing the salary level of teachers up.

[ER:] Is it also perhaps a um certain kind of um lack of freedom for the teacher as regards his old thinking and the thinking of the board wherever he may be employed?

[Roy Larsen:] Well I think that perhaps plays a part but I think it's-it's a great many factors that have worked together to-to discourage uh the kind of youngsters that we should have in teaching-teaching from going into it. Um but I think that um matter of freedom is of course an important [unclear].

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mr. Larsen, you mentioned that since the end of World War II that a considerable amount of progress had been made in raising the standards of pay, is that true all over the United States?

[Roy Larsen:] It's spotty, to be sure, but I think it's as--it can be as a general statement that there--

[ER:] Well I'd like to ask one other thing, um do you think it's partly the question um we seem as people to recognize the importance of plants, we have um we-we do a good deal about um the plant of the school more than ordinarily we worry about the people who are going to impart knowledge in that school. I wonder if it's partly social. If um in our communities we do not accord the kind of importance to the teacher that we should.

[Roy Larsen:] I think that's true, I was amazed however, feeling as you do about that, to find in a survey made last fall that uh when questioned about the relative importance and influence of various kinds of people in the-in the community that a cross section of people right across the land uh put the public school teacher as first in importance in the community--over the minister, over the lawyer, over the public officials. [Elliott Roosevelt: Is that so--] [ER: Well I'm enormously encouraged.] Now those are the best teachers they were talking about-- [ER and Roy Larsen overlap] (17:43)

[ER:] I'm enormously encouraged if that is-is so by and large through the country.

[Roy Larsen:] Well that seemed to be the answer. Now they were talking about the best teachers. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] And I-- to me it was tremendously heartening because it indicated that people do recognize, on a quality standard, that the public school teacher in the community is a tremendously important influence.

[ER:] Well I think of course the public school teacher holds the most important position in any community [Roy Larsen: I do too.] But I-I wondered first of all whether they always had the opportunity to become the kind of person because I do think uh we vary greatly in this country in what we give as preparation to our teachers.

[Roy Larsen:] That is true and um I've been surprised to find that in some of our state normal schools the uh facilities and the amount of money made available by the state was way below the amounts made for similar uh numbers of students to some of our liberal arts colleges and other-other educational institutions.

[ER:] Well, that has always bothered me very much because I've always felt that it was as important to make our state normal schools um the highest possible standards and to give even opportunities that were not given uh in other places. For instance I think something should be done in our state-- in the years that a student spends in state normal school we draw our-our pupils in the state normal schools from the average of American life throughout the country [Roy Larsen: Right.] and very often those youngsters on their own um resources [Roy Larsen: Mhm.] have little opportunity for some of the broadening that education should bring them in order that they may [Roy Larsen: Well rounded.] be better teachers whereas the-the um youngster in other colleges uh sometimes has those resources uh in-in their own hands. Now I have had a feeling for a long while that in some ways it is being met now in part by exchange of teachers with different countries [Roy Larsen: Mhm.] but I have wondered whether before, while they were in normal school, we shouldn't do a little more uh in their vacations of travel in this country. I mean guided travel so they learn something [Roy Larsen: Mhm.] and also in other parts of the world because it contributes so much to future ability to be of use. (20:42)

[Roy Larsen:] I think that's an excellent idea. It--my impression is like yours as to the uh fact that perhaps their training is a little too narrow. I think it'll interest you to know that um Dr. Harold Stoke, who resigned in December as President of Louisiana State University has just joined our commission to direct a study, a long range study of the American public school teacher.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well then your commission really isn't made up entirely of laymen, then.

[Roy Larsen:] Well he is uh not a member of the commission. He will be the educational consultant and director on that study.

[ER:] I'd like to hear if you're willing to tell us some of the members of your commission.

[Roy Larsen:] Yes indeed, we-um-we have a really distinguished group I feel and um I'm uh I may say that each one of them is very much interested in this particular job that we've come together to do. The vice chairman of the commission is James Brownlee who uh you'll remember was the deputy director of OPA during the war and is now associated with Mr. Whitney. Leo Perlis the national director of the CIO Community Services Committee is secretary of our commission. Mrs. Mary Bingham of Louisville is the chairman of the-of the committee on the study of-of the teacher. Beardsley Ruml is a chairman of a study we are making on public education financing which uh is being carried out at present in cooperation with practically all of the educational associations. Um Richard Joyce Smith, a New York lawyer who also happens to be chairman of the board of education of Fairfield, Connecticut, my hometown, uh is chairman of the committee we have established to study [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] the school board. Henry Toy, um formerly of Delaware and of the DuPont Company is our executive director and I feel particularly fortunate that we have a-a young man to head our staff who had his own personal experience with developing community interest in the schools as he did in the development of the Delaware education councils a few years ago. Um we have several publishers, Mrs. Bruce Gould [Beatrice Blackmar Gould], and editors--Mrs. Bruce Gould of the-of the *Ladies Home Journal*. Mr. John Coals of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and publisher of *Look*. We have um Walter Lippmann, um--

[ER:] How many have you altogether?

[Roy Larsen:] There are some thirty-five.

[ER:] Goodness! [Roy Larsen: And-and--] That is quite a--you got people from other parts of--

[Roy Larsen:] Businessmen, such as Neil McElroy, the head of Procter and Gamble and George W. Mead of the Mead Paper Company. Karl Menninger the great psychiatrist, uh Victor Reuther brother of Walter from Detroit um, Harry Scherman the president of the Book of the Month Club and Louis Seltzer-- [all names in preceding paragraphs have been checked-- CR]

[ER:] I think you have a very representative board.

[Roy Larsen:] I think it is, now you'll notice that there are no educators on that-- on the commission, nor is there anyone um identified especially with politics. We have--we've felt that we should be a completely independent [ER: Independent.] group. (24:14)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] May I interrupt this moment and then we'll come right back to our uh questions regarding the commission's work and uh-uh but right at this moment we have to allow our announcer to say a few words.

(Break 24:27- 24:34)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now Mother I think we can return to uh this very interesting discussion of the problems of our public schools between yourself and Mr. Larsen.

[ER:] Well I'd like to ask if you try to conduct all the commission's work from New York or if you have regional offices?

[Roy Larsen:] We uh now do have two regional offices, one in Louisville um under the direction of Maurice Bement who was formerly connected with work of the Committee for Kentucky which I'm sure you know about [ER: Yes, I-I know about--] and uh--and just this past week we've set up a second regional office in Sacramento, um and we've-we find that through personalizing our work in helping communities uh organize to-to study and work for their schools that it-it increases the interest. I might say that having mentioned these various study committees that the um major part of our work in the past two years has been in the encouragement of community uh school committee organizations and um that has been um done by mobilizing the forces of advertising. For example the advertising council has done a magnificent job in getting over by a radio and television and newspapers and billboards the importance of our public schools today. Um the um newspapers and magazines and--and radio have all--I-I observed stepped up their coverage of school affairs and discussions of school problems just as we are having right now. [ER and Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And um all those things have--have uh helped to create more interest and--and um our commission has organized itself to provide and supply interested people with information on just what they can do about their interest, and um we've done that not by trying to give them um pat ideas as to how to go at their problems but rather to tell them how other communities have done it--other communities whose circumstances were similar to-to their own [ER: Yes.] and that seems to be very effective.

[ER:] Well how did you, as a publisher, become interested in this field?

[Roy Larsen:] Well I, with several others, um became interested when several educators approached us several years ago and suggested that laymen should be doing more and busy laymen uh particularly should be doing more about public education than they were and they pretty much challenged us to consider the possibility of organizing ourselves into such a commission as has devolved to do something about it [Elliott Roosevelt: Well--]. Mr. [James B.] Conant of Harvard was one of those men-- Paul Mort of-of Columbia--William Carr the National Education Association and several educators who felt that perhaps the time had come when they needed some help and some better and more understanding on the part of some of the neighbors.-

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well you said you have devoted uh many pages of *Time* and *Life* magazines to uh bringing the state of our public schools to the attention of the American public.

[Roy Larsen:] Thank you I am very proud of what *Time* and *Life* both have done in that way. (28:17)

[ER:] Well now I know that during the last year you've travelled round the country a great deal, talking to citizen groups, I imagine [Unidentified speaker coughs] of course that you had help through the commission to get started uh--

[Roy Larsen:] It--very often yes.

[ER:] Well now generally speaking um do you find um a greater interest uh has been developed everywhere or do you find in some places it's pretty apathetic?

[Roy Larsen:] It uh again uh --generally speaking I'd say the interest has increased tremendously. There are still pockets and spots where the apathy is just as deep and settled as ever but we are in touch at commission headquarters today with a thousand communities who have organized just in the past two years to-to study their schools and to help work--working with the school authorities to do something about it. And we gather from a check made, for example, in New Jersey recently that we know of only about a third, perhaps even less than that of the actual communities who have done and are doing something [Elliott Roosevelt: Mh-hm].

[ER:] Well now are you organizing primarily by counties or by townships and the uh-- how-how do you do--?

[Roy Larsen:] Well, we encourage the-the um--principally the local community, but in the past several months we have been helpful I think in-in getting some state citizen groups organized and as a matter of fact today some twenty-five states now have uh state wide groups and they are helping to uh encourage the organization of community groups and are helping the org--the community groups which are organized with information about the state um matters of legislation and rules--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now is this--

[ER:] I should think it would be almost--I beg your pardon.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Excuse me, go right ahead.

[ER:] Well I just think it would be almost impossible not to begin with a state group because each state uh has different uh rules and regulations.

[Roy Larsen:] That- that's true but it did work the other way. [ER: It did.] The community started first and except for example in Delaware, where the state works uh--it's a small state and everything stems from there but-but it's only recently that the states have been stepping up their uh amount of state support and the communities have been pretty much on their own. (30:43)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well Mother and I happen to live in a community where uh in the thirties they built a school system which was then almost one third empty, but the--is now only half as large as is required in the community. And uh-uh now they have the problem of building new facilities and building--stepping up their whole educational program. Are there any definite recommendations that you make to uh citizen's groups in a community such as that as to how uh their uh financing should be done, how their uh--how they should spend the money whether to spend it on uh fancy buildings or [Roy Larsen: No, uh--] on uh utilitarian buildings.

[Roy Larsen:] I see what you mean. No we do not make recommendations. We feel that's the very thing that the people of the community should decide. They should decide just how much they want to spend, what they want, and then do whatever is necessary to get it. It--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] What if they uh come asking for information?

[Roy Larsen:] We, still, give them what-what um authoritative reports there are or suggestions there are but we encourage them and urge them to sit around the table with their school people and the school board and figure it out for themselves and that's the great strength I think of our school system. That-that each community sets its own standards. Now of course there has to be a minimum level and that concerns us all--

[ER:] Well I remember--uh it happens that in the community where-where we live um for a great many years uh they went along at uh a more or less stable level you see? [Roy Larsen: Mhm.] Then they began to go up a little in population and it was at the time when you were getting federal aid [Roy Larsen: Mhm] that they were urged to accept it and to bond themselves to build [Roy Larsen: For building, mhm.] new schools. And oh there was tremendous reluctance to do it because they'd never assumed a debt, and they felt that it was quite terrible to do it. [Roy Larsen: Mhm.] Um they did it and thought "oh what over spending" and so forth [Roy Larsen laughs] and so on. And today they're really very indignant because they weren't at the time told that they should have much more. [Roy Larsen: Yeah.] They'd forgotten

completely that at the time much of it was empty and they thought it was horrible over spending then [Roy Larsen: I see.] and now I think the same old things are operating. There's no national money to come in and um they're having uh- they're having a bad time and there must be over communities going through the same things. [Roy Larsen: Mhm.] I'd like to ask just one question: Why do you think public education is so important to the future of this country?

[Roy Larsen:] I think that it still is, as it always has been, a cornerstone of our whole system here, social, political, economic. I think our founding fathers recognized that and um and I think that public schools and public education has been one of the great forces in the development of this country and now more than ever we need citizens who can think and vote intelligently and take their role as leaders of the world. (34:10)

[ER:] Well I agree with you whole heartedly and I grieve that we have to come to an end because there's so much more that I would like to ask you. [Roy Larsen laughs] Thank you very much for coming today.

[Roy Larsen:] Thank You.

[Break: 34:22 -34:37]

[ER:] Now I'd like to ask Mr. Michael Nathan who's a young businessman from New York to ask a question.

[Michael Nathan:] Mrs. Roosevelt, from everything uh we hear the country's food supply is plentiful; in fact we have even stored up huge surpluses of food. Why then are food prices so high and why are they continuing to rise?

[ER:] Uh I- I think I should have the Department of Agriculture here too today but I think perhaps both of you would like to answer that. How about you Mr. DiSalle do you like to answer that?

[Michael DiSalle:] Well, Mrs. Roosevelt of course you're familiar with the Department of Agriculture's support program and that has a tendency to maintain the floor underprices and we have a job of maintaining ceiling overprices but in addition to that the Defense Production Act of 1950 has a provision which says that we cannot control the prices of food that uh --until they've at least reached parity. Well most of your food commodities in the country today are below parity and some of them substantially below parity. And so uh we have to at least under the act as it's written today, wait until the items reach parity. However a very interesting facet of this whole thing is that farmer--farm income for the past three years has gradually gone down and the farmer claims that they are in the only group which shows a decline in national income for the past three years, and whatever statistics can be gathered on that kind of support their position. Now we don't know whether the increase in food prices can-- are there because of a spread of margins at retail and wholesale levels. Those are the things that we're attempting to prod right now and in the very near future we are going to issue some regulations on food in which we are going to attempt to freeze margins to some pre-Korea period. That may affect the readjustment of food prices. Well the farmer claims that out of a loaf of bread that you pay sixteen cents for, he gets two and a half cents for his wheat and he wants to know where is the difference between the two and a half and sixteen cents. The retailer says, "Well my wages have increased. I going to have to pay more to my help today." The wholesaler says his cost have gone up. And so we're involved in that problem attempting to fix the proper relationship between the raw commodity and the commodity that you buy at retail, and I don't mind telling you there are no simple answers to a good many of the questions that we have to face.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now it's time to close the program and to remind you that you've been listening to the *Eleanor Roosevelt Program* which comes to you every Monday through Friday at this same time. And this Elliott Roosevelt speaking and wishing you all good day.

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