

# Lip

# Industrial Worker

ORGANIZATION / EDUCATION / EMANCIPATION  
AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL  
(SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT)



## LIP, THE FACTORY WITH NO BOSS:

After learning about company plans to cut pay and fire 500 workers outright, the workers at the Lip watch factory in Besancon, France took the plant over and ran it themselves for two months.

The takeover was sparked by the company's announcement that workers would not be paid for June and that vacation pay would be withheld that summer.

In 1960 the Lip factory opened in Besancon with 1200 workers. The manufacture of

high-quality watches and a spectacular technical-research program soon made it widely known. Within a few years, however, competition from Japanese and US companies forced Lip to seek money for expansion. A deal was made with Ebauches, a Swiss bank that also owns Longine's, the largest Swiss watch company.

In 1971 the company was unable to meet its payments, and control passed from the founder, Fred Lip, to Ebauches. The bank's

only interest in the Lip plant is as an assembly plant for parts made in its Longine plants in Switzerland, using the well-known Lip trademark to expand into new markets in France. Their first attempts at layoffs, in February 1971, backfired so badly that it was a year and a half before they tried again.

In early 1973, suspicion began to spread that the company had something up its sleeve. Several departments were kept half

idle for months, and the most-incredible incompetents began to take over key management positions. One Lip worker said in an interview: "They know nothing about Lip, they know nothing about watches, they know nothing about factories. I'm surprised they can tie their shoes right!"

In late April the company announced that 300 workers would be laid off, and that cost-of-living raises and other benefits would cease. Workers replied with a slowdown that cut production to 20% of normal, co-ordinated by the Lip Action Committee, which was made up of the two unions — CGT and CFDT — and a large number of rank-and-file workers. A demonstration of 1000 workers was held at Besancon's city hall on May 10th, and 5,000 workers and supporters marched on the Swiss Consulate and the local office of Ebauches on May 24th.

Then on June 12th, the administrators of the factory declared that the company was applying for bankruptcy, and the workers would receive neither their salaries nor their vacation pay.

Upon hearing that announcement, the day shift held two managers captive while they searched the offices for more information about the company's plans. While going through the files they found plans to lay off 500 workers, starting with 200 June 15th. The layoffs were to be justified by an artificial "bankruptcy" created by deliberate underproduction and mismanagement. The plant would be converted to an assembly plant for Longine's, the Swiss watch company owned by Ebauches. A wage freeze and police surveillance of shop stewards and union committee men and women were included in the plan. And despite the firm's alleged bankruptcy, \$1,700,000 was to be spent putting the plan into action.

That night several hundred police broke into the plant and released the two managers. Several workers were injured in the assault.

The next day a general assembly of all Lip workers voted to occupy the factory to "safeguard our tools". The workers demanded guaranteed jobs, continued payment of wages, and staggered vacations, so the factory would never be empty.

The workers also decided to take over the 65,000 finished watches in the storeroom. These watches were hidden somewhere in Besancon. One worker told a reporter: "These watches are being held as our guarantee of continued employment."

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## FRANCE AND THE STIKE

The French capitalist class is more nervous now than at any time since the spring of 1968. The Lip occupation and the continuation of production there under the workers' self-management has set a memorable precedent for the French working class. The eviction of the workers from the factory by the police launched a chain reaction of sympathetic strikes and demonstrations around the country, even in the more-remote provincial areas.

The women garment workers at a textile plant near Besancon have already followed the Lip watch makers' example. After a stormy strike and lockout they continue to produce and market shirts and blouses "underground", at a lower price than their

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## What Does It All Mean?

"Lip is the most disturbing social conflict... because the continued social production after a robbery, in essence, of the stockholders, calls into question the principles of authority, of property, of responsibility, of respect for contracts vis a vis suppliers and subcontractors, which are the very base of our economic system and commercial law."

Paris Chamber of Commerce

"The Lip workers have shown that bosses are not indispensable, and that the workers are capable of organizing themselves on their own, even in the economic sphere. It is not the management of Lip that has been challenged, but the whole employing class."

General Assembly of Lip Workers

## What Does LIP Mean To Us?

"We knew all along we could get along without the boss, but this proves it positively."

Lip Worker

"They accuse us of 'taking the law into our own hands'. But the bosses' right to lay us off, that's their right to take the law into THEIR own hands... we are just using our right of self-defense."

Lip Worker

The Lip strike shows two things. First, we CAN get along without the boss. The Lip workers ran their factory for two months, making all decisions by vote of the workers, and produced enough — despite boss and government interference — to pay three months' wages: June, July, and August. If we can do that on our own, what do we need bosses for? Let's lay THEM off!

Second, we can here and now challenge the bosses' "right" to increase their profits at our expense. There's no need to sit still for layoffs, speedups, pay cuts. Lip workers did it by taking over their factory and using it as a weapon against the boss. He wouldn't pay them? Fine. They paid themselves. He shut down the plant? No sweat! They simply started it up again, for themselves. He got them busted out of the factory? No problem. They moved half a mile and started over. Besides, they still have \$2,500,000 worth of watches as hostage. The police and four detective agencies have been looking for those watches for months, but they've run into a wall of solidarity. It seems no one will give them so much as the time of day.

Lip workers need our support. Donate money, spread the word, maybe buy a watch. But remember: The best support we can give our fellow workers at Lip is for us in turn to take our own affairs into our own hands. Our lives are our own. We don't have to let the bosses run them.

And that's what Lip means to us.

CAMARADES IL PARAÏT QUE VOUS AVEZ ARRÊTÉ LE TRAVAIL.

oui oui oui

SI VOUS AVEZ DÉBAYÉ C'EST QUE VOUS AVEZ DES REVENDICATIONS À FAIRE. JE SUIS VOTRE DÉLÉGUÉ VOUS NE DEVEZ RIEN ME CACHER.

C'EST LES SALAIRES HEIN CAMARADES? VOUS VOULEZ UNE AUGMENTATION HEIN?

C'EST ÇA HEIN?

OU ALORS C'EST LA SÉCURITÉ OU LES VACANCES? IL FAUT QUE JE PLACE LE GOUVERNEMENT ET LE PATRONAT DEVANT LEURS RESPONSABILITÉS. PARLEZ À VOTRE DÉLÉGUÉ QUI VOUS AÏNÉ.

PARLEZ LES ALLEZ.

TAS DE SALOPARDS! VOUS ALLEZ ME DIRE POURQUOI VOUS ÊTES EN GRÈVE. OUI OU MERDE!

ON VEUT FAIRE LA RÉVOLUTION.

LA RÉVOLUTION! VOUS ÊTES FOUS! LE GOUVERNEMENT ET LE PATRONAT NE MARCHERONT JAMAIS.

WOLINSKI

"Brothers and sisters, you seem to have stopped work."

"Yes!" "Yes!" "Yes!"

"If you've walked out it's because you have grievances. I am your business agent. I'll fix it up for you."

"It's the pay, right? You want a raise, right? That's it, huh?"

"Maybe it's the insurance? Or the vacations? Tell your business agent who loves you. — Come on, tell me!"

"YOU MISBEGOTTEN REDNECKS! Will you or will you not tell me why you're on strike?"

"We want to make the Revolution!"

"The Revolution? You must be crazy! The bosses will never give you that!"

## France And The Strike

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boss was able to sell them at. Small wonder that French employers are now urging their government to enact further repressive controls on labor.

The trade-union bureaucracy, the Communist Party, and the other "revolutionary" political sects had nothing new to offer in reaction to the events at Lip, other than the usual assurances that such social conflicts would not be necessary under a "workers' government". Made uneasy by the sight of workers taking their own affairs in hand, it was almost with a sigh of relief that the Leftist political groups responded to the military coup in Chile. It seems that they were more interested in organizing protest marches to demand socialism for a land thousands of miles away than in trying to make any practical imple-

mentation of it at home.

In Paris, the opening of the Sorbonne for the fall semester found the police patrols heavier than usual on the Left Bank. Morning, noon, and night, paddy wagons are kept strategically parked along the Boulevards Sainte Michele and Saint Germain, scenes of the beginning of the 1968 near-revolution. But the ability of the authorities to maintain capitalist law and order among the students and intellectuals of the Latin Quarter may have little effect in 1973. It is in the workplace, at the point of production, that the latest threat to French capitalism is growing. And there are not enough police to invade every factory and office in France.

Martin Comack  
X325154

# DIRECT ACTION

The Lip strike is several months old now. The workers are united and determined, despite efforts of the bosses, the government, and the press to divide them, and their chances of winning grow.

ONLY ACTION PAYS! is the principle that guides the Lip workers in their fight. A decision results in immediate action, and legalities are not allowed to stand in the way of self-defense. For example:

THE BOSS	THE WORKERS
Threatens layoffs	Occupy the factory
Shuts down the plant	Restart production for themselves
Refuses to pay wages	Pay themselves with the sale of watches they have made

These forms of action are possible only when the strange ritual of "observing the proper forms" (petitions to politicians, delegations, and so on) is bypassed. Only when workers decide to take action to solve their own problems are results possible.



## THE FACTORY WITH NO BOSS

(continued from Page 5)

On June 14th, after the company had twice refused to answer their demands, the workers voted to re-start production. Over the next two months they produced 60,000 watches, sold them at a 40% discount, and were easily able to pay themselves their June, July, and August wages.

The company accused the workers of theft and threatened to prosecute anyone buying a Lip watch for receiving stolen goods. The French Attorney General, however, refused to process the charges, saying: "One cannot arrest the entire working class." Lip workers responded in a statement saying: "Nothing we are doing can be considered illegal. These watches are the fruit of our work."

On August 10th a French court ordered the workers to leave the plant and return the 65,000 watches. They refused. At about 5 am August 14th, 3,000 riot police broke into the factory and evicted the 50 workers on guard there.

This action provoked protest strikes and demonstrations in hundreds of factories and dozens of cities. It failed in its purpose. The raid was made to break up the democratic "workers' commission" form of organization that is essential in the effective running of the strike, and to stop the production that was keeping workers on full pay while they struck. Perhaps even more frightening to the bosses was the example Lip was setting for other French workers. Just before the raid, a nearby striking textile factory copied them.

On August 23rd Lip workers were able to report: "We have maintained the collective organization of our strike. As of August 16th, we have defeated the purpose of the bosses and the government. We have relocated in the Palante neighborhood, less than half a mile from the factory in a building given us by the city.

"The building is the gymnasium of the Jean-Zay School. We have renamed it the

'new Jean-Zay Lip factory' because we think the factory is where the workers are.

It is here that we have re-installed the commissions that let us run our strike effectively and democratically. The strength of our movement depends on our active participation and the collective decision-making that is the foundation of our commissions. When we were thrown out of the plant by force, the bosses and the government were not just trying to enforce the law, they were trying to destroy the collective democratic organization of our strike. But in a few days we have been able to reconstruct most of our commissions and retain the united collective nature of our movement.

"For example, the Restaurant Commission, bolstered by the exceptional solidarity of our cooks and dishwashers, started functioning again last Monday."

And a week later: "Production started again last Friday in our 'underground factory'. It is being carried out by volunteers only. Actually, we've had to turn people away, since everybody wants to take part. We are putting out 80 to 100 watches a day, and quality is better than ever even though we don't have much of the machinery we had at the plant."

Negotiations were begun on the 25th of August, but were broken off when boss and government negotiators continued to insist on at least 200 layoffs. Workers also rejected a proposal that they become stockholders in the company. Their reply read in part: "Capitalism got us into this mess. We will not become capitalists!"

The strike goes on. Now more than ever Lip workers need the support of their fellow workers not only in France, but worldwide. The fight against layoffs, plant shut-downs, and pay cuts concerns us all. The only answer is to do as Lip workers did: TAKE THINGS INTO OUR OWN HANDS!!

# The March On Besançon

(SEPTEMBER 29TH, 1973)

At LIP, while the negotiations (still being attended by 50 to 80 members of the firm — ordinary workers, not just union delegates) get absolutely nowhere, the Action Committee and the "Popularization Committee" — made up of LIP workers, union and non-union members alike, with some outside aid (the PSU and the local, not the

national, CFDT, and ordinary townsfolk) — organized in three weeks a march on the town.

In spite of difficulties in organizing the march, like the national unions' disclaiming all responsibility, the refusal of the local Mayor (a Socialist) to give municipal aid, and the Mayor's attempt to dissuade the Committee from organizing, more than 100,000 people turned out. Even the weather was unfavorable. It was rainy, muddy, and cold. Despite this, we saw groups from

Carassonne and Montpellier in the extreme south of France, from the extreme north of France, and from Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, and Germany. Many had come in organized coaches, but just as many individuals came in their own cars and by train.

At 1 pm the crowd assembled to march four or five miles in the pouring rain from the camp site through the center of town to a large square on the other side. We looked behind us. The roads are very narrow and winding in Besançon, and we could see the

cortege winding between two bridges. Halfway along the route we could still see people starting off at the first bridge. Toward the end they were still starting off from that bridge. There must have been at least 100,000 people marching in the pouring rain. (Traffic estimates varied from 40,000 to 150,000.)

Many marched without being a part of an organized contingent. Of those who came with groups, the union contingents marched first. The CGT had many local sections, but there were no national representatives, and the union itself did not demonstrate as a national body. The same went for the CFDT. The PSU also had a sizable group, but no Maoists were to be seen as organized contingents.

Between the unions, the PSU and a few anarchist groups, came the unattached, and behind them the one Trotskyist group which supported the march, the ex-Ligue Communiste. They, contrary to all the other Trotskyists, had really brought out their forces. We estimated about 10,000 behind their banners. They marched like an organized army, and were of course there to show their political strength rather than to support Lip, which was a disquieting note in the march. The non-union contingents were larger than the union ones.

The square at the end of the march was too small to hold all the demonstrators, and most drifted away soon after they had arrived. There were some speeches, but thousands of strangers roamed the town, up and down the main streets, exhilarated by the march but tired and hungry.

Practically all the shops in the center of town had shut. Some posters had appeared on the walls, purporting to come from the "silent majority", against the invasion of hordes from outside, but most had been torn down again. Clearly the shopkeepers feared that their establishments would be smashed up, but still some, tempted by the prospect of all that trade, opened up. As soon as more than 10 people were inside a shop, they shut it down again.

The one rare cafe which remained open throughout served mulled wine. The baker's around the corner gave us free cakes in addition to the bread we bought. Newspaper reports about the town's being in a state of siege were highly exaggerated. Some of the townspeople watched from their windows and some from the pavements, and of course some were in the demonstration; but it is true that, especially in the richer areas, many stayed behind closed shutters.

For most, the march was over. However we noticed a crowd around one stand, and on checking discovered that it was drawn by Lip workers selling watches, almost on the sly. They hadn't announced this because of the police, but in a corner they were doing brisk business. The previous day they had sold watches on the site as well, and so far they had collected about \$2,450 from sales (not counting the evening sales).

We discovered that no attempt had been made to approach the Lip factory. When we passed by the factory in the morning, we noticed that it was protected by barriers and barbed wire. Only two policemen were outside the factory, the only two policemen we saw during our whole stay in Besançon.

Nobody knows what the eventual outcome of the Lip struggle will be. An absolute victory seems unlikely, and the negotiations drag on with no change. They started up again today. The march has not directly affected the situation, and it is a pity that the rain drowned out all possibility of discussion. Nevertheless, the fact that the Lip workers organized and wanted the march and drew support from 100,000 people from all over the country in the pouring rain and icy cold cannot help but encourage the struggle.

This is essentially a small local battle that has caught the imagination of so many. Lip workers have held out for three months and have two to three months' wages in hand. (The third wage payment took place just before the march.)

Eye-witness account of march from a small Paris contingent



"The General Assembly Meets"



## CHRONOLOGY:

- 1960: Lip plant opens in Besançon.
- 1961: Locals of CGT and CFDT formed at Lip.
- 1965: Lip Company negotiates loan with Ebauches, a Swiss bank that owns a major Swiss watch company.
- 1968: General Strike in France. Lip workers win pay raises, automatic cost-of-living increases, and other benefits.
- 1969: Company tries to force overtime during Christmas holidays. Slowdown and strike threat win no forced overtime.
- 1970: Long series of one- and two-day strikes against company attempts to take back gains won in 1968-69.
- June 1970: Company refuses to make payments into pension fund. Mass meeting in plant by both unions. For the first time, many non-union members take active part.
- January 1971: Lip Company fails to make loan payment. Control of the company passes to Ebauches.
- January 12: New management announces layoffs of 40 secretaries and clerical workers and 10 production workers.
- January 13: Unions hold joint meeting to plan action against layoffs.
- January 14 to February 4: Slowdowns and demonstrations within plant.
- February 5: Layoffs canceled.
- December 12, 1972: Several departments put on half time. Incompetent new managers begin to take over key positions.
- February 7, 1973: The CFDT and CGT issue a joint statement denouncing the situation and demanding an explanation.
- April 5: Lip Action Committee formed, with representatives of both unions and many rank-and-file workers.
- April 15: Company announces 300 layoffs and an end to cost-of-living raises.
- April 15 to 26: Slowdowns, work stoppages, and demonstrations within plant. Leaflets and posters explaining the situation distributed in Besançon. Support committee formed.
- April 26: 500 Lip workers demonstrate at Besançon city hall.
- April 27: 1000 Lip workers demonstrate at Besançon city hall.
- May 10: One-day strike. Workers demonstrate at Swiss Consulate and Ebauches office.
- May 24: 5000 workers and supporters march in Besançon.
- June 14: Company claims bankruptcy and announces that wages and vacation pay will not be paid. Workers hold two managers prisoner in their offices. Find plans for 500 layoffs and a wage freeze in company files.
- June 15: General Assembly of all Lip workers votes for occupation of the plant so as to "safeguard our tools". Assembly approves taking 65,000 watches hostage "as guarantee of continued employment" and demands continued payment of wages, and no more layoffs.
- June 16: Company twice refuses to answer workers' demands. 1500 workers, supporters rally at factory.
- June 18: General Assembly votes to resume production and pay wages by selling the watches produced.
- June 20: Workers' commissions set up.
- July 3: Company accuses workers of theft, threatens to prosecute anyone buying a Lip watch.
- August 1: Workers pay themselves their June and July wages.
- August 10: Court orders workers to leave plant. They refuse.
- August 14: 3,000 riot police break into plant and evict 50 workers on guard. 10,000 workers and supporters demonstrate at plant.
- August 15: Hundreds of factories, mines, and offices closed by protest strikes. Strikes close ports of Marseilles and Dunkirk. Mass demonstrations held in Paris, Toulouse, Marseilles, and dozens of other cities and towns.
- August 16: 24-hour protest strike by railroad workers ties up all rail traffic in France. One-hour general strike called by CGT and CFDT. Workers' commissions re-established at "new Lip Jean-Zay factory".
- August 21 to 30: Negotiations with government mediator Giraud broken off when Giraud insists on at least 200 layoffs.
- August 31: Workers pay themselves for the month of August. Production resumes at "the underground factory".

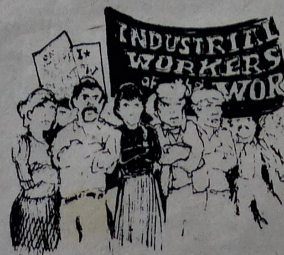
## WORKER'S COMMISSIONS

If a strike is made up of striking workers, the Lip strike actually runs itself. All decisions are made by the General Assembly of all Lip workers, which meets at 2 pm every day. Proposals are made by the unions, the workers' commissions, and individual workers. The Assembly also hears the reports of the commissions.

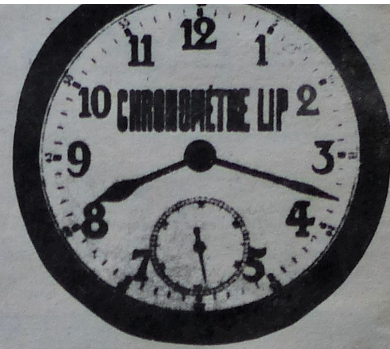
The decisions of the Assembly are carried out by the workers' commissions. The commissions meet at 9 am every day to discuss what has to be done and plan out the day's work.

Special commissions are sometimes set up by the Assembly, but the standing ones are the Production Commission, made up of the workers producing the watches; the Sales Commission, which fills orders for watches and receives payments; the Restaurant Commission, which cooks the community meals; the Solidarity Commission, which stays in touch with support groups and keeps track of the flood of supporting messages; the Finance Commission, which keeps track of the money and takes care of the records; the Publicity Commission, which spreads the word about the strike through speaking tours, posters, leaflets, and a movie, and the Hospitality Commission, which greets and guides visitors and answer letters. Membership in the commissions is rotating, with each worker taking a turn on each commission.

There are no bosses and no leaders — just fellow workers who have taken their lives into their own hands.



# watch it!



FL 73

"It's time to take things into our own hands!"



"Wait a minute! Who said you could do that?"

## How WE Can Help

"Lip workers, how can we help?" The striking Lip workers hear and read this question a hundred times a day. Workers have come down or written from all over France, all over Europe, all over the world. Lip workers need three things: money, publicity, and active support.

**Money:** Since the police broke into the factory, production has been down from three to four hundred to just one hundred watches a day. This means Lip workers can't produce enough to support themselves. So send money, by taking up a collection at work or among your friends.

**Publicity:** More of our fellow workers need to know about the Lip strike. Pass this supplement around. Order more from the IWW. If you read and write French, write the Lip Commission de Popularisation, UD - CGT, 11 Rue Battant, 25 Besancon, France. If there is a French Consulate in your area (check the phone book), a picket line after work or on a weekend will spread the word and give support to the Lip workers and their allies.

**Support:** Write or telegraph your support to the Lip Commission de Solidarite, same address as above. Set up the picket line we mentioned before. But the best support you can give to Lip workers is to do as they did. Take your lives into your own hands!

### OUVRIERS INDUSTRIELS DU MONDE PRÉAMBULE

La classe ouvrière et la classe des patrons n'ont rien en commun. Aussi longtemps que les quelques personnes qui composent la classe des patrons jouissent de toutes les succulences de la vie, et que des millions d'ouvriers se trouvent dans le besoin ou souffrent de la faim, la paix ne peut-être rétablie.

Une lutte continuelle se livrera donc entre ces deux classes jusqu'à ce que les ouvriers du Monde organisent la leur, prennent possession de la terre, des instruments mécaniques de production, de même qu'ils abolissent le système des gages.

Nous avons trouvé que le groupement de l'administration des diverses industries dans quelques mains de moins en moins nombreuses, réduit les unions de métiers à l'impossibilité d'opposer le pouvoir toujours croissant de la classe des patrons. Les unions de métiers encouragent un état de choses qui permet un groupe d'ouvriers d'être déchaînés contre un autre groupe d'ouvriers dans la même industrie, s'aidant ainsi à se vaincre les uns les autres dans des guerres de gages. En plus de cela, les unions de métiers aident les patrons à encourager les ouvriers dans la fausse croyance que la classe ouvrière et celle des patrons ont des intérêts communs.

Ces conditions ne peuvent être changées, ni les intérêts de la classe ouvrière soutenus que par une organisation ainsi formée que tous ses membres, d'une industrie particulière, ou si c'était même nécessaire, de toutes les industries, cessent l'ouvrage lorsqu'un service quelconque est en grève, ou lorsque les patrons refusent d'admettre les représentants ouvriers dans la solution de leurs disputes communes, de ce fait transformant une injustice individuelle en une injustice générale.

Au lieu de la devise réactionnaire, "De bons gages pour une bonne journée," il nous faut inscrire sur notre bannière le mot d'ordre révolutionnaire, "Abolition du système de gages."

La mission historique de la classe ouvrière est de se débarrasser du capitalisme. L'armée productive doit être organisée, non seulement à cause de la lutte quotidienne contre les capitalistes, mais aussi pour continuer le travail de production quand le capitalisme aura été renversé. En nous organisant industriellement, nous formons l'édifice d'une société nouvelle dans les ruines de l'ancienne.



## WHO ARE WE?

This supplement is produced by the Industrial Workers of the World. We are a labor union, founded in 1905 on the principles of militance, solidarity, and industrial unionism. We believe that while the boss needs us, we don't need the boss, and that the Lip strike is an outstanding modern example of this. If you want to know more about us, want more copies of this supplement, or want more information about how you can help support the Lip strike, write to the IWW, 752 West Webster Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60614 (USA), or to your local branch or delegate. This is produced as a supplement to the Industrial Worker, our monthly publication.

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