THE RECOOP OVER 50'S PEER-LED BUDDY SUPPORT SERVICE: 'RADICAL HELP' AS 'MUTUAL AID' IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM?

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Abstract

In this think-piece and position paper we argue that the RECOOP peer-led Buddy support training and management service provides an example of best practice in working with older people in prison which also supports services working within the criminal justice system more generally. It does this by providing a template for 'radical help' across all criminal justice services, prefiguring a more democratic criminal justice system based on 'mutual aid' (Nicholson, 2019). 'Radical help' is about new ways of organising living and growing that have been developed by communities across the UK, with human connection at its heart. When people feel supported by strong human relationships change happens, and when we design new systems that make this sort of collaboration feel simple and easy, people want to join in (Cottam, 2018). In this article we argue that this is exactly what RECOOP Buddies do with older people in prison and that what they do in prison can provide a template for the 'radical help' of 'mutual aid' across the wider Criminal Justice System.

Keywords
Mutualism, peer support, advocacy, penal welfarism

RADICAL HELP, MUTUAL AID AND THE DECLINE OF WELFARISM

According to Hilary Cottam (2018), the welfare state is no longer fit for purpose. It can no longer support people in an emergency. Social care and the full panoply of the state's welfare services are failing to enable everyone to live a good life. The whole system of welfarism is at a loss when confronted with a range of modern challenges from loneliness to entrenched poverty, from a changing world of work to epidemics of obesity and depression, not to mention the physical and mental health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The welfare state was the foundation stone of post-war society, but today this once life-changing project has lost its way. For Cottam, not only is it in decline, it is degenerating into a management state; an elaborate and expensive system of managing needs and their accompanying risks.

So what should be done? The political left say more money will solve the problem. The political right say the opposite – if the state stopped interfering, people would do better. Cottam points out that while these diagnoses are diametrically opposed, their programmes for action are remarkably similar – both sides want to focus on the money and to rearrange the institutions. They simply want to *manage* things differently, and for Cottam this will simply not work.

Her solution of 'radical help' comes from a third political tradition – variously described as mutualism (Mayo & Moore 2001), radical liberalism (Grimond 1978) or libertarian socialism (Luard, 1991). Paradoxically it was this same philosophy of mutualism that influenced the main architect of the post-war welfare state that is now in decline, the Liberal William Beveridge (Beveridge, 1942).

Beveridge envisaged both a strong role for the state in welfare, as well as a strong role for the traditional social institutions of mutual aid – trades unions, friendly societies, cooperatives and mutuals and the voluntary sector as a whole. Cottam claims he became increasingly alarmed to see the state take over and become the monopoly provider of welfare. Beveridge saw himself as laying the foundations of a 'welfare society' not a 'welfare state' (Beveridge, 1948). The state should enable people themselves to provide their own welfare through mutual aid rather than become passive consumers of the state's monopoly provision.

For Beveridge the state's role should be to "*encourage voluntary action of all kinds"* and to "*remove difficulties in the way of friendly societies and other forms of mutuality".* In their turn, the role of friendly societies and the voluntary sector should be "*to meet new needs by new methods, in the old spirit of social advance by brotherly co-operation"* (Beveridge, 1948 quoted in Knight, 2012). So, Beveridge's original vision was of the "*brotherly co-operation*" of mutual aid as the guiding principle of welfare: mutual aid as a voluntary reciprocal exchange of resources and services for mutual benefit in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing the socio-economic conditions in which they find themselves (Shantz & Williams, 2014; Shepard, 2015). It is based on a philosophy of mutualism'.

> "…a philosophy which describes how we are to live with one another…concerned with the values, principles and practices which specify the conditions under which we are prepared to join our efforts to those of others in order to secure together what we cannot secure alone…[it] is therefore fundamentally relational, where mutual inter-relations possess the normative features of mutual respect, mutual esteem, dignity, equality, fairness and care".(Yeoman, 2019)

Reinventing a twenty first century version of Beveridge's mutualism is Cottam's vision of 'radical help' – what she calls 'Beveridge 4.0'.(Participle, 2010). For Cottam 'radical help' operationalises Beveridge's original vision of mutual aid in welfare. At its heart is a simple premise, that what is needed is a radical shift, leaving behind the twentieth century welfare state's emphasis on the state managing needs or fixing people's problems, and moving on to create a means of preventing those problems arising in the first place by…

> "…supporting individuals, families and communities to grow their own capabilities: to learn, to work, to live healthily and to connect to one another…modern welfare must create capability rather than manage dependence…it must create possibility rather than seek only to manage risk; and it must include everyone, thereby fostering the connections and relationships that make good lives possible" (Cottam, 2018, page 18)

For Cottam then '*fostering the connections and relationships that make good lives possible*' through the mutualism of 'radical help' is what social welfare should be all about – welfare is much more than simply social care, it is about making good lives possible. And it is the mutual aid of fostering connections and relationships that make that possible. It's about people helping each other to create a good life for all.

For Cottam, the origins of this conception of the good life through mutual aid lie much further back in time than Beveridge who is just one among many manifestations of it. She points to Judeo-Christian conceptions of the way we become human through our relationships with and care for each other and the natural world around us; the way we become human through mutual aid. Going further back, the idea that mutual aid and the work of caring for one another is the core of our humanity and wellbeing is found in Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia* and in ideas around *sapiens integra* in which tending to one another and the wider infrastructure that shapes our world is what enables us to flourish and develop to our full potential. (Cottam, 2021).

So, for Cottam 'radical help' in social care is not just about caring for each other, it is about rediscovering what it is to be human and to flourish by caring for each other. It is everyone's mutual responsibility to care for each other and we will all flourish and develop to our full potential by doing so. That way we will also rediscover a philosophy of mutualism fit for the twenty first century; a philosophy that recognises that…

> "…care is a continuum: we need every-day time that allows us each to contribute, and we need the expertise of professionals working within redesigned support systems. This redesign then does not start within the

current system. It starts with this very different understanding of the role care plays within human and natural world systems. This in turn provides the very different principles that can guide and govern the creation of those new systems." (Cottam, 2021, page 14)

Those principles are the principles of mutualism put into practice through the 'radical help' of mutual aid and they contrast with the principles of the twentieth century welfare state in the following ways:

- The welfare state seeks to fix problems; radical help seeks to grow the good life

- The welfare state seeks to manage need; radical help seeks to develop capability

- The welfare state is transactional; radical help is relational

- The welfare state audits money; radical help connects multiple forms of resource

- The welfare state contains risk; radical help creates possibility

- The welfare state is closed and targeted; radical help is open where everyone takes care of everyone else

Echoing Beveridge's original vision, all six of these principles can be summed up as

- The welfare state is state aid; radical help is mutual aid. (Mackenzie 2021)

RADICAL HELP, THE CARE OF OLDER PEOPLE IN PRISON AND THE DECLINE OF PENAL WELFARISM

Radical help then, is about how to create the conditions for good lives, which means the ability to support and care for one another, across the life span. It is about how to create the conditions that enable people to help each other to create a good life for all and it is needed in prison just as much as in the wider community to which prisoners will return. But like the welfare state that spawned it, penal welfarism is also in decline – the application of the principles of the welfare state to penal contexts is in decline just as much as the welfare state is in the wider community. Social care and the full panoply of the state's prison services are failing to enable everyone in prison to live a good life – in every sense of the word 'good'. They are failing to enable people to support and care for one another; they are failing to enable people to rediscover what it is to be human and to flourish by caring for one another; and they are failing to rehabilitate prisoners and enable them to live good lives (Willis et al 2013).

In the specific case of welfare services for older people in prison this decline of penal welfarism is exacerbated by their rapidly increasing numbers and the unsuitability of existing prison regimes, facilities and services for the needs of older people.

Prisoners aged 50+ represent the fastest-growing demographic group in the prison population in England and Wales (Bezuidenhout & Booyens, 2019: Ridley, 2021; Maschi et al 2021) and it has been argued that they are the fastest growing prison age group around the world (Baidawi & Trotter, 2016: Di Lorito et. Al. 2018). More than one in six people (17%) in prison in England and Wales are aged 50 or over (Prison Reform Trist, 2022). The prison population in England & Wales is projected to grow by a quarter in the next three years (Ministry of Justice, 2021). This reflects a rise in imprisonment due to the 'mass imprisonment epidemic', combined with increased longevity, mandatory minimum sentencing laws, and the impacts of recent prosecutions for historical offences including sexual abuse (Howse et.al. 2003).

This increase in the number of older people in prison has been accompanied by a significant expansion in the quantity, scope and breadth of published research exploring their welfare needs and experiences (Joyce & Maschi, 2016: Hayes et. Al. 2013: Kim & Peterson, 2014: Human Rights Watch, 2012:Mann, 2012: : Codd, H. (2018).: de Motte, 2021). A systematic analysis of 21 papers published between 2002 and 2019 identified older prisoners in the UK and other countries as having relatively high levels of need and the study also highlighted a relative lack of knowledge around the needs and characteristics of older women in prison (Wilkinson & Caulfield, 2020). There is a great deal of variation in how prison establishments and systems meet these needs, and approaches to older people involved with prison and probation in England & Wales have been described as reflecting 'institutional thoughtlessness' (Crawley: 2005: Cadet, 2020).

The published research has documented the many challenges faced by older people in prison. Broadly speaking, prisons have been designed for non-disabled young men, and have not ordinarily been designed as totally accessible environments which respond to the needs not only of different ages of prisoner, but also prisoners as they age.' Some prisons have created designated accommodation units for older people, with varying levels of success. Much of the research focuses on healthcare and medical needs whilst other research has highlighted the inadequacies of prison provision in relation to employment, education, social, spiritual, and cultural needs for older prisoners, who experience additional 'pains of imprisonment' from the lack of these building blocks of the 'good life' (Cottam, 2018).

Many prison buildings are old, built on multiple levels without step-free access, and lack full accessibility. (Mann, 2012). Where older people are in shared cell accommodation, climbing in and out of bunk beds can be a struggle and pose major safety risks. Older prisoners may face problems moving from their cell to dining facilities, may not be able to wait in a queue and may not be able to hold or carry a tray. Similarly, educational and social facilities may be too far away for prisoners to walk. The inaccessibility of prison buildings can create de facto solitary confinement for older prisoners if their physical or mental health needs make it impossible for them to leave their cell, and to engage in social, educational and recreational activities.

Older prisoners are more likely than younger prisoners to be living with long term chronic health conditions including diabetes, hypertension, COPD, pain and vision or hearing loss,

on average each older person living with three medical conditions (Chiu, 2010).[1] A recent joint report by RECOOP and Clinks found that of the 110 older people who took part in the consultation, 61% reported having physical health issues, 37% had mental health problems, 59% said they had a long term health condition (85% of women reported having a physical health problem and 45% reported a mental health problem) and 27% reported that they needed help to care for themselves (Clinks & RECOOP, 2021). Mental ill-health is common, including dementia and cognitive decline (Brooke et.al., 2020). Some commentators argue that pre-existing lifestyle, health and wellbeing, combined with the impacts of prison settings, mean that people in prison 'age' sooner than people outside prison (Merkt et.al., 2020), this 'accelerated ageing' also impacting on cognitive impairment, chronic health conditions, mental health and mobility. This means that older people in prison sometimes experience health conditions and disabilities more often seen in people who are ten years older (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2013: Cipriani et,al. 2017).

In contrast though, for some older people health and wellbeing may be improved by the 'penal welfarism' of the prison setting, especially where people have been living chaotic lives prior to imprisonment or experiencing insecure housing and homelessness, lack of food and nutrition, and lack of medical care. The provision of healthcare though can conflict with the operational demands of the prison regime, as seen in problems reconciling the needs for medication at specific times with the day-to-day routine of the prison, and healthcare needs can be impacted negatively by staff shortages, which can create particular difficulties for older prisoners if they need help in accessing healthcare or taking their medications. (Davies et.al., 2021). Older prisoners do not experience being treated with respect, and their dignity is violated on a daily basis including by lack of privacy in shared cells and lack of dignity in personal care.

The principles of the welfare state – of 'penal welfarism' – have failed to 'fix' these problems. State aid has failed. Does the 'radical help' of mutual aid begin to provide a solution? Cottam (2018) describes a series of experiments giving people control to improve their own lives through different expressions of the 'radical help' of mutual aid, but none of these experiments take place in a penal context. None apply the principles of mutualism to prison services in general or prison social care services for older people in particular.

But in an earlier work (Cottam, 2002) she outlines a set of principles for a '21st Century Prison' developed through a collaborative enquiry involving prisoners and an interdisciplinary team. These principles focus on grouping prisoners into small communities or 'Houses' to create an enabling environment for mutual learning and peer support, involving them far more in the day-to-day running of prisons to ensure they are safer for staff and prisoners and operate more effectively as humane and constructive places – in other words a rough outline of what the 'radical help' of mutual aid in prison might look like.

Our argument is that it is the sort of peer support in prison outlined in Cottam (2002) that begins to provide a solution to the problems described above by acting as a delivery

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[1] This is a US-based study but its findings are valuable in the UK context for illustrating the range and scope of health challenges experiences by older people in prison.

mechanism for the development of mutual aid in prison services, enabling people in prison to support and care for one another; enabling them to rediscover what it is to be human and to flourish by caring for each other; and enabling them to live 'good lives' by helping rehabilitate each other – prisoners helping each other create a good life for all. (Willis, et al, 2014).

PEER SUPPORT IN PRISON: THE 'RADICAL HELP' OF MUTUAL AID?

In partial response to the needs and experiences of older people in prison described above, and in partial response to the Care Act (2014), HMPPS issued national guidance (Prison Service Instruction [PSI], 17/2015) instructing governors to mobilise able-bodied prisoners to provide peer support for others with needs, legitimating the role of the prisoner peer caregiver, and we would argue. Also implicitly legitimating the 'radical help' of mutual aid in the care of older people in prison – legitimating prisoners helping each other create a good life for all.

Prisoners providing peer support for other prisoners with needs is by definition an example of mutualism in a penal context*, "where mutual inter-relations possess the normative features of mutual respect, mutual esteem, dignity, equality, fairness and care"* (Yeoman, 2019). As such, peer support can be seen as 'radical help' in a prison context, involving prisoners far more in the day-to-day running of prison services to ensure the prison is safer for staff and prisoners and operates more effectively as a humane and constructive place that begins to enable people in prison to live a good life (Cottam, 2002).

Such peer support schemes exist in a number of countries including England & Wales, the US and Australia (Canada et.al., 2020) although they do not exist in all prisons: in England, for example, they are offered by RECOOP in two clusters of prisons, one cluster in Devon and one in the North West area. This programme of peer-support for older prisoners mirrors other forms of in-prison peer support, such as Listeners schemes, all of which can be seen as examples of the 'radical help' of mutual aid in a penal context, benefiting not only the recipients of peer care but also the carers themselves, helping promote a pro-social sense of identity and positive citizenship and thus contributing towards the possibility of desistance for both carers and the cared for (Perrin et.al. 2018).

RECOOP explicitly locate this sort of peer caregiving in the discourse and practices of mutualism. Their Mission Statement explicitly states their aim is to help and promote mutual aid amongst older individuals with convictions and implies that their preferred delivery model for advocacy and service delivery development is similarly through the discourse and practices of mutualism: -

> "RECOOP's mission is to help and promote the care, resettlement, rehabilitation and mutual aid of older individuals with convictions through advocacy and service delivery development".

The RECOOP Buddy programme is the prime example of this 'radical help' through mutual aid and is one element of the range of programmes and activities provided in a number of prisons in England and Wales as a response to the unmet needs of older people. These are often provided by external NGOs or third sector organisations, rather than delivered directly by the state, so can be seen as further examples of what might be termed 'penal mutualism' in contrast to the declining 'penal welfarism'. As such they may be considered more in keeping with the original Beveridge vision which Cottam claims can be fulfilled in the twenty first century by the 'radical help' of mutual aid.

For example, at HMP Wymott the Salvation Army provides the CAMEO ("Come And Meet Each Other") Centre which offers a changing range of opportunities including quizzes and board games, and Age UK runs similar centres in other prisons. Similarly. RECOOP runs a number of day centres including the 'Rubies' project for older women at HMP Eastwood Park. These combine purposeful activity with social interaction in a variety of forms of mutual aid, and feedback from users and prison inspectors alike has been very positive.

Furthermore, the 'radical help' of mutual aid in the RECOOP Buddy Programme acts not as a direct alternative to penal welfarism in the social care of older people in prison, but rather adds value to it to fulfil Beveridge's original mutualist vision. Speaking of the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Societies of his day, he says: -

> "Prisoners' aid work is thus an example of social service largely carried on by voluntary zeal, regulated and assisted financially by the State through the medium of a co-ordinating body mainly representative of the voluntary agencies themselves." (Beveridge, 1948, page 263)

The RECOOP Buddy Programme has a similar relationship with the state. Thus, the Care Act 2014 places what might be called a 'welfare state responsibility' on local authorities and Prisons to work jointly in order to provide social care support for all prisoners who meet the state determined eligibility criteria. But whilst assessed needs above the state eligibility criteria should be met by the local authority, arrangements still need to be made to meet the needs below that threshold – what Beveridge called *"the needs that remain in a social service state"*- which a mutualist voluntary sector should work in partnership with the state to meet (Beveridge, 1948 page 217). But what the RECOOP Buddy Programme does is go beyond the 'Discharged Prisoners' Aid' model by basing 'Prisoners' Aid' on the mutual aid of peer support – further fulfilling Beveridge's original mutualist vision.

Responses to the Care Act 2014 have been diverse and varied as a result of this need to meet care needs below the state determined threshold. RECOOP is now delivering a Buddy Support Worker Training Programme developed for use in prisons by adapting standards from the National Care Certificate. These are the occupational standards to which workers across Health & Social Care services adhere.

This Training Programme enlists the 'radical help' of mutual aid of the Buddy Programme to add value and fulfil the spirit and the letter of the penal welfarism of the 2014 Act. It entails fellow prisoners, trained to National Care Certificate standards, assisting their peers who need practical help, such as collecting meals, cleaning their cell and more. A prisoner

undertakes a 14-Module Programme covering aspects such as communication and advocacy, privacy and dignity, mental health and more. This ensures they are fully trained and given the appropriate knowledge to become a buddy, providing both short and long-term support. The Buddy role is well-paid by prison standards, and in combining the possibility of skills development with financial reward, as well as other less material rewards, is attractive to peer volunteers.

A short survey by RECOOP at one establishment, HMP Wymott, has highlighted the substantial positive impacts on perception of quality of prison life of having a Buddy, along with much-increased levels of perceived independence, feeling supported, having their issues resolved and engagement in activities (Ingle, 2022) - the positive impacts of prisoners helping each other create a good life for all.

Independence:

> *"[My buddy] is helpful, sociable, checks that I'm ok and if I need anything."*

Support & advocacy:

> *"If the Buddy wasn't present I wouldn't be able to talk with anybody about how I am feeling day to day. But since he's there, I feel much more supported and I would be lost without him."*

Quality of prison life:

> *"I'd like to take this opportunity to praise my Buddy, he has in my opinion gone beyond the call of duty just to make sure I am settled, I feel comfortable and I am a lot happier in jail now."*

The Buddy Programme is not only positive for the clients; those who become buddies also find the experience very positive. It can give them purpose and they can actually see the progression of the client over the time they are looking after them.

> *"I've done many jobs in the prison, but being a Buddy is definitely the most rewarding. I can see that I'm making a real difference to a fellow prisoner. Poor bugger, I wouldn't want to be in his shoes in here. It's a win-win situation. He gets the support he needs, I get to show that I'm not all bad and that there is still a good side to me". (Trained Buddy)*

The ultimate aim of the Buddy Programme is for the service user to regain their independence so they are able to have a better quality of prison life and begin to build a good life in prison – exactly what the six principles of 'radical help' aim to do in the wider community. So just like the 'radical help' of mutual aid:

- the Buddy Programme seeks to grow the good life for older people in prison

- the Buddy Programme seeks to develop the capability of older people in prison

- the Buddy Programme is relational, building relationships not just delivering a service to older people in prison

- the Buddy Programme connects multiple forms of resource - a commissioned service with trained prison labour working with older people in prison

- the Buddy Programme creates the possibility of the flourishing of older people in prison by prisoners caring for each other

- the Buddy Programme is open and takes care of everyone involved, care givers as well as care recipients.

Our contention is therefore that the RECOOP Buddy Programme is an example of the 'radical help' of mutual aid in prison, which begins to fulfil Beveridge's original vison of a 'welfare society' rather than a 'welfare state' in a specifically penal context, enabling prisoners to help each other create a good life for all – what might be characterised as 'penal mutualism' as distinct from 'penal welfarism'

THE RECOOP BUDDY PROGRAMME - A (RE)EMERGENCE OF PENAL MUTUALISM?

There is nothing new in prisoners helping each other create a good life for all through schemes like the RECOOP Buddy Programme. There is nothing new in the 'radical help' of mutual aid in prison. Prisoner-run welfare and resettlement services were a common feature of eighteenth and early nineteenth century English prisons (Ignatieff, 1978). Similarly in the United States, Thomas Mott Osborne set up 'The Mutual Welfare League' in Sing Sing Prison, New York State in 1914 (Hickey & Scharf, 1980). This was a prisoner membership organisation which provided a 'through the prison gate' welfare, resettlement and job brokerage service to its members. Similarly, in 1928, Alderson Women's Prison in West Virginia set up 'Co-operative Clubs' in each of the prison's 14 cottages to achieve the same ends (Toch, 1994), while more recently in 1973 'the prisoners ran Walpole' and participated fully in their own 'corrections' (Bissonette, 2008).

What schemes like the RECOOP Buddy Programme do in prison can also provide a template for the 'radical help' of mutual aid across the wider Criminal Justice System as they have done in the past. We have seen above how the role of the Buddy includes not only practical assistance, but also elements of advice and advocacy, as well as often being experienced by both Buddies and the recipients of their care as something of a befriending service which can support their mutual desistance. This is all very close to the 'advise assist and befriend' of traditional probation service discourse and practice (Jarvis, 1972) and Marco (2015) suggests that peer mentoring schemes like this are signs of a re-emergence of 'advise, assist and befriend' in contemporary probation practice.

This traditional probation discourse and practice was restated in terms of 'relational co-production' as a key element in the 'essence of probation' by Senior *et al* (2016) and

depicted through the lens of 'mutuality' by Nicholson and McKeon (2021) in which they locate through the prison gate employment cooperatives as key to a 'mutual future for probation', building on its origins in the 'radical help' of mutual aid. In the same way our contention is that schemes like the RECOOP Buddy Programme can provide a template for the 'radical help' of mutual aid across the wider Criminal Justice System. Can this justifiably be described as the re-emergence of a historical form of 'penal mutualism' though, superseding the declining 'penal welfarism' and presenting an alternative to the 'penal populism' of the culture of control that some claim has replaced it? (Garland, 2002).

Any talk of 'penal -isms' goes back to David Garland's work, which highlights the political undercurrents of profound shifts in criminal justice practice across the 19th and 20th centuries (Garland, 1985, 2002), He demonstrates how shifts in punishment are embedded within broader systems of thought and politics, identifying the political and economic transformations which informed the shift from classical penality to penal welfarism in the UK, and then from penal welfarism to neoliberal penalty or the 'penal populism' of opportunity reduction, actuarial prediction and the 'responsibilization' of sub-state voluntary sector and private actors for crime control rather than the offender rehabilitation of 'penal welfarism'.

Historically the political, social and economic transformations Garland describes were all met with forms of resistance, accommodation and the development of alternatives, all based on mutualism (Thompson, 1968; Birchall, 1994). Any account of how historically mutual forms of penality map onto this is beyond the scope of this paper but does, we think, merit further theoretical consideration. In practice though, we would argue that schemes like the RECOOP Buddy Programme not only provide a template for the 'radical help' of mutual aid across the wider Criminal Justice System, but also fulfil key elements of both 'penal welfarism' and 'penal populism' rather than superseding them both. Thus the Buddy Programme helps fulfil Beveridge's vision of welfare as a mutual enterprise rather than a state monopoly. By doing so it also helps fulfil 'penal populism's' project of the 'responsibilization' of sub-state voluntary sector and private actors for crime control. By 'responsibilizing' prisoners and the wider sub-state voluntary sector for both crime control *and* offender rehabilitation the Buddy Programme helps prisoners help each other create a good and crime-free life for all. In doing so, our argument is that the 'penal mutualism' of the Buddy Programme fulfils both 'penal welfarism' and 'penal populism' rather than superseding them.

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