

A RECENT INTERPRETATION OF THE ACHAEAN ASSEMBLIES

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THE interpretation to be examined is that of Dr. A. Giovannini in his article, "Polybe et les assemblées achéennes," in *Museum Helveticum*, XXVI (1969), 1-17. It has been the subject of a laudatory note by G. Daux and a critical appraisal by F. W. Walbank.¹ The latter recognizes great merits in Giovannini's article but does not agree with the general conclusion. In my opinion, the article contains considerable excellent detailed work but fails because the author at times draws important conclusions on the basis of little or no evidence.

Before taking up the article in detail it may be well to give a short account of the development of the interpretation of the assemblies.² Four stages or interpretations, including my own and that of Giovannini, will be given below. All draw heavily upon the account in Polybius 29. 23-25 of a *synodos* of the Achaeans at Corinth in 168 B.C. followed by a *synkletos* at Sicyon attended not only by the *boule* but by all citizens over thirty.

(1) It was a common view in the middle of the present century that in the Polybius account just mentioned the *synodos* was a council or smaller assembly that could also be called a *boule*; the *synkletos*, a primary assembly open to all full citizens above thirty years of age. From other evidence it was concluded that the *synodos* had several regular meetings during the year, while the *synkletos* met only when specially summoned. This view is essentially the one followed by me in my Harvard dissertation of 1927 on representative government. According to this the Achaeans had

representative government limited only by something like an occasional referendum.³

(2) The great challenge to the above interpretation came with the publication of A. Aymard's *Les Assemblées de la Confédération achaienne* in 1938. Aymard maintains that in Polybius *boule* means a deliberative assembly (*assemblée délibérante*) and could be applied to a primary assembly (p. 155, cf. pp. 67-75), and that also the *synodos* is a primary assembly. Since in this argument he is followed by Giovannini, it may be well to note that in Polybius 29. 24. 5 he takes *agora* to mean a primary assembly (p. 77). Aymard's interpretation has been widely accepted but was rejected in reviews by Cary and myself, chiefly on the ground that *boule* is used so consistently in Greek to denote a smaller council in opposition to a primary assembly that this must be the case also in Polybius.⁴ In the first edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* under "Achaean League" it was stated that agreement had not yet been reached on the question whether the *synodos* was "a primary assembly, a representative assembly, or a combination of a *boule* and a primary assembly."

(3) Next comes my own effort. I essentially held the interpretation given above as (1) until I started to go over the Achaean material for inclusion in *Representative Government*. Then suddenly it became clear that scholars had been wrong in taking *synodos* and *synkletos* as names for the bodies assembled at the meetings. On the contrary, the terms used by Polybius for the bodies that assembled at the meetings are *boule* and *ekklesia*, and by *boule* he must mean a council as opposed to a primary assembly. Of the two terms for meetings, *synodos* is the more general term, while *synkletos* means a specially summoned extraordinary meeting, the meetings of this kind that we hear most about being extraordinary meetings of the *ekklesia* or primary assembly. With the addition of certain modifiers, *synodos* commonly

1. G. Daux, *BCH*, LXXXIII (1969), 430; F. W. Walbank, "The Achaean Assemblies Again," *Mus. Helv.*, XXVII (1970), 129-43. The editors deserve sincere thanks for the promptness with which they made this study available.

2. I shall naturally draw on my own earlier studies, particularly *Representative Government in Greek and Roman History* (Berkeley, 1955) and *Greek Federal States: Their*

Institutions and History (Oxford, 1968). These will be cited as *Rep. Govt.* and *Gk. Fed. States*.

3. Cf. the first (1927) edition of W. W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilization*, pp. 66 f.

4. M. Cary, *JHS*, LIX (1939), 154 f.; Larsen, *CP*, XXXVI (1941), 406-9.

indicates one of the regular meetings of which several were held every year, while in the second century the *ekklesia* met only at irregular meetings specially summoned.

This, of course, means a denial of the allegation that Polybius applies *boule* and *ekklesia* to the same body. To be sure there is a passage in which scholars (myself included) have thought that the two words were applied to the same assembly, but this was based on a misinterpretation. It is the report of a visit in 170 B.C. of Roman ambassadors who were alleged to have planned to appear before the *ekklesia* to accuse certain Achaean statesmen but gave up this plan and instead appeared before the *boule*, which was specially summoned to hear them.⁵ With this passage eliminated, the only proof that Polybius used the two words about the same body would be the application of both terms to the body meeting at the regularly scheduled meetings (*synodoi*) of the Achaeans. Notice, however, that both bodies might attend the same meeting, so that the presence of one need not exclude the presence of the other. There is ample evidence for the presence of the *boule*, but there is also one instance in which the *ekklesia* clearly was present at a regular *synodos*. The account of a meeting in 220 B.C. by Polybius (4. 7. 1) begins as follows: οἱ δ' Ἀχαιοί, καθηκούσης αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν νόμων συνόδου κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον, ἦγον εἰς Αἴγιον. συνελθόντες δ' εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν . . . ἐψηφίσαντο. The meeting was clearly a regular *synodos* taking place at a time fixed by law, and it was clearly a meeting of the *ekklesia*. This, of course, does not exclude the presence of the *boule*. At a meeting in 229 both bodies were present though only the *boule* is mentioned by name. The officials assembled the Achaeans, probably to an extraordinary meeting, and made a decision together with the *boule* (Polyb. 2. 46. 6). This can hardly have been anything but a meeting of the primary assembly with the *boule* acting as a probouleutic body. There are also cases in which there were decisions made at the regular *synodoi* of the kind later reserved for special meetings of the *ekklesia*, but all such meetings recorded took place before 217.

The natural conclusion is that in the earlier period the regular scheduled meetings of the Achaeans were meetings of the primary assembly,

with the *boule*, as in so many Greek states, acting as a probouleutic body. This was all radically changed when a law was passed forbidding the summoning of the primary assembly, the *ekklesia*, except for special problems, namely, alliances, war, and later also written communications from the Roman senate. The question to be presented was announced in advance, and no other subject could be acted upon. On the first day the subject was presented; on the second day motions or proposals were made; on the third, the votes were taken. This procedure was in full swing in 200 and thus must have been adopted between 217 and 200 B.C. The other business of the state was handled by the *boule*, which now no longer was a probouleutic council but became a representative assembly handling most of the business of the state.

This reconstruction was in part based on Aymard's argument (pp. 415–21) that the *synkletos* as set forth above under (1) was differentiated from the *synodos* shortly before 200, which then is taken as the time when the legislation was enacted which reserved special cases for extraordinary meetings of the *ekklesia* and further ordered that this body should not be summoned except for such meetings. Of course, Aymard's general interpretation in other respects differed from mine, primarily on account of his belief that the *boule* was a primary assembly. This issue was settled by the publication in 1954—too late for me to cite it in *Representative Government*—of a fragmentary inscription apparently from the late fourth or early third century, referring to the *boule* of the Achaeans and showing that a federal *boule* of the council type existed at the time.⁶ This makes it practically certain that the *boule* of the Confederacy as revived in 281 was also of the same type, even if it should prove that the later organization was an entirely new creation and not, as is much more likely, a revival of the old one.⁷

(4) And now Giovannini's interpretation.⁸ This aims at defending the accuracy of Polybius fully as much as at reconstructing the Achaean assemblies. Starting with the *synodos* at Corinth in 168, and relying largely on the statement in Polybius 29. 24. 5 that the discussion concerning military aid to the Ptolemies was cut short on the ground that it was contrary to law to make a decision

5. Polyb. 28. 3. 7–10. For a fuller treatment and references to older literature, including a very few scholars who had observed this before me, see *Rep. Govt.*, pp. 93 f. and 215 f. (nn. 17–19). It is a pleasure to note that G. interprets the passage in the same way.

6. SEG XIV, 375 first published by J. Bingen, *BCH*,

LXXVIII (1954), 402, No. 18; P. Åström in the *Opuscula Atheniensi* of the Swedish Institute at Athens, II (1955), 4–9; cf. *Gk. Fed. States*, p. 86.

7. On this point, cf. *Gk. Fed. States*, pp. 83 f. and 216.

8. An excellent summary is given by Walbank in his introductory paragraphs.

concerning military aid in the *agora*, Giovannini concludes that the body assembled at the *synodos* at Corinth was not, as most of us have thought, the *boule*, but a primary assembly. This solution is based largely on the view, held also by Aymard, that *agora* means a primary assembly. The use of the word by Polybius Giovannini (p. 4) considers awkward, but he takes the prohibition against decisions concerning military aid as applicable not only to the *synodos* but to all primary assemblies of the Achaeans (p. 6).

If this is correct, it becomes impossible, of course, to accept the traditional interpretation that the *synodos* at Corinth was a meeting of the *boule* while the *synkletos* at Sicyon was not only attended by the *boule* but was also open to all citizens over thirty—a common interpretation of Polybius 29. 24. 6, which also has been held to indicate indirectly that the age qualification for voting was thirty years. Limitation of the right to vote to citizens over thirty, according to Giovannini (p. 9), would be a violation of the democratic principles of the Achaeans praised by Polybius (2. 38. 6). The meeting at Sicyon was not a regular assembly but a *senatus amplior*, the *boule* supplemented by all citizens over thirty, a body so organized by special arrangement. *Synkletos* is a technical term and means an assembly of which neither the composition nor the competence is fixed by law (p. 7). Special attention is given to the laws forbidding the gathering of the *ekklesia* except for certain specific problems. This gives the impression that there were two primary assemblies, the one meeting regularly at the *synodoi*, and the *ekklesia*, which met only when summoned to deal with special problems. This interpretation, however, is contradicted by Polybius 4. 7. 1–2, which reports that when the legal time for the *synodos* came around the Achaeans gathered at Aegium in the *ekklesia* (p. 11). It is also noted that only two decisions are known to have been made by the *ekklesia* while decisions by the *synodoi* are numerous.⁹

The final conclusion is that there was only one Achaean primary assembly which met at regular intervals at the *synodoi* and could be summoned to special sessions when circumstances made it

desirable (p. 13). This leaves the problem: why could the *synodos* at Corinth not act on the question of military aid when it was a meeting of the primary assembly? The answer is the *boule*. The assembly could not make decisions unless the question had been considered in advance. Nor could it refer the question to the *boule*, which was present at the meeting, because it was contrary to law for the assembly to take up questions other than those for the consideration of which it had been summoned.¹⁰ Hence it was necessary either to wait for the next *synodos* or convoke an extraordinary assembly (p. 16).

In this relatively brief summary, I hope that I have done justice to Giovannini's interpretation. It is written so persuasively that individual arguments seem plausible, but they add up to an impossible conclusion.

It is hardly too much to say that Giovannini's entire article stands or falls with the interpretation of the statement in Polybius 29. 24. 5, quoting the Achaean statesman Callicrates as saying that it was contrary to law to deliberate on military aid in the *agora*. The latter word is taken to mean primary assembly. This prohibition, it is maintained, applied not only to the *synodos* but to all primary assemblies (p. 6). The translation of *agora* as "primary assembly" is accepted too easily and asserted too positively. Almost the only statement resembling an argument is a reference to Aymard, who translated the word in the same way (p. 6 and n. 37), but Giovannini does point out that the use of this word is awkward, as all must agree. It is probably true that in the few cases in which *agora* is used in documents of various states as the name for an assembly, the body so designated is the larger or

9. P. 12. It ought to be noted that the *synodos* at Aegium in connection with which the *ekklesia* is mentioned took place in 220. Also, as is duly noted, three of the decisions by *synodoi* belong in the same year. Of the decisions cited from the second century, several involved renewals of old alliances of a kind hardly reserved for the *ekklesia*. Note also that the *ekklesia* would appear more prominent if the evidence of Livy 31. 25 and 32. 19–23 on the meetings of 200 and 198 had been included. Cf. *Rep. Govt.*, pp. 171 f.

10. This statement about the prohibition against assemblies dealing with subjects other than those for which they had been summoned is based on Livy 31. 25. 9, in spite of the author's declaration (p. 3, n. 19) that he would not draw on Livy. The meaning as shown by the context is that any single meeting could act only on the single question for which it had been summoned.

primary assembly in contrast to a *boule*. This, however, does not prove that it must always mean a primary assembly rather than just a meeting or assembly. As Giovannini points out (p. 5), in the only other passage in which Polybius uses the word about an Achaean institution, it means a session of an assembly, the reference being to "the first agora" (Polyb. 28. 7. 3) much as in other places there are references to the first or second *synodos*. Thus, though this is not Giovannini's view, it looks as if *agora* is used in both passages as a synonym for *synodos*.¹¹ Moreover, the insistence that the prohibition covered all *ekklesiai*, or rather the same *ekklesia* at both regular and extraordinary meetings, and the assertion of the need for *probouleusis*, make it necessary to take the prohibition to mean that no business could be transacted without a *probouleuma*. If this was simply the universal rule and practice of the Achaeans, that the *boule* deliberated and the assembly of the people made the final decision (p. 16), it would seem unnecessary to quote the law.

The lack of *probouleusis*, however, was not the ground for the objection of Callicrates. His objection was based not on the irregular procedure, but on the nature of the subject. The *synodos* was not permitted by law to act on a question of military aid (Polyb. 29. 24. 5). This in itself implies that there were other questions on which it was competent to act. Moreover, it is clear that Callicrates claimed that *boetheia* (military aid) was a subject reserved for an extraordinary meeting of the *ekklesia*. The incident fits perfectly into the application of the rule that questions of war were reserved for extraordinary meetings of the *ekklesia*. To be sure, it was possible to send military

aid to a belligerent without involving your own state directly in the war, but such aid might very well lead to war.¹² Probably this was not the only occasion on which there was disagreement about whether military aid should be treated as a question of war.¹³ In the present case it is well to note that the Ptolemies asked for a thousand foot and two hundred horse (Polyb. 29. 23. 5) but also sought to raise mercenaries in Greece. And at the later meeting at Sicyon Polybius in his speech argued that, if the Romans were to ask for help, the thousand foot and two hundred horse sent to Alexandria would not make the Achaeans unable to send the requested aid (29. 24. 8). Clearly neither the Ptolemies nor those Achaeans who favored sending the requested aid thought that it would involve the Confederacy in war. Callicrates may have argued otherwise, but he obviously was more interested in preventing action than in points of law.

There seems no escape then from the conclusion that Callicrates succeeded in securing a ruling for the time being to the effect that questions of military aid came under the rule that the *synodos* was not permitted by law to make a decision on a question involving war. This, in turn, must mean that the later meeting at Sicyon was an extraordinary meeting of the *ekklesia* summoned to deal with a specific subject. An almost conclusive proof of this is found in the reference of Polybius (29. 24. 10) to the second day of the meeting, at which the motions concerning the disposal of the question had to be made. This fits perfectly the procedure at such meetings, as known best from the account of the meeting at Sicyon in 198, at which the Achaeans decided to transfer their

11. This is approximately the interpretation favored also by Walbank (pp. 137 f.).

12. Cf. Walbank, p. 133.

13. Polybius 33. 16 in his report of a *synodos* in 154 at Corinth implies that *boetheia* was not war. Again action was

prevented by Callicrates, who argued that the Achaeans should neither go to war nor send military aid without instructions from the Romans. There is no suggestion that the *synodos* was unqualified to act on a question of military aid; cf. n. 19.

allegiance from Macedonia to the Romans (Livy 32. 19–21). Giovannini is aware of this argument but states that nothing indicates that this rule applied particularly to *synkletoi*. It may have applied to the *boule* or even to all Achaean assemblies (p. 7, n. 40). The use of such a rule in the *boule*, however, is almost unthinkable. As for its use in all Achaean assemblies, Giovannini's suggestion is a direct contradiction of the earlier emphasis on *probouleusis*. It involves a procedure in which there was no *probouleuma* but motions were made from the floor. Of course, as Walbank correctly observes (p. 131), "there is no evidence at all for the Council acting as a probouleutic body for the Achaean assembly in the second century."

There seems to be no alternative but to return to the old interpretation. The *synodos* at Corinth was attended only by the *boule* and magistrates, while the *synkletos* at Sicyon was a meeting not only of the *boule* but of the *ekklesia* open to all citizens over thirty, and thus no citizens under thirty were allowed to vote. To this Giovannini (p. 9) objects that the age limit for voting is a radical departure from the democratic principles which, according to Polybius (2. 38. 6), were the basis of Achaean institutions. This passage of Polybius sounds very good, but it is probably largely patriotic rhetoric. In any case, before expressing oneself on the subject, one should try to learn what democracy meant to a writer of the second century B.C. Scarcely had democracy been restored at Athens after the overthrow of the Thirty Tyrants before efforts were made to improve democracy by reforms that others would call oligarchic. To cite only one example, Demetrius of Phalerum, who controlled Athens for Cassander at a time when a property qualification

of one thousand drachmas was required for the right to vote, apparently in his memoirs claimed that he not only had not overthrown democracy but actually had improved it.¹⁴ Polybius himself clearly used the term rather loosely when he referred to the Achaeans adopting democracy immediately on the overthrow of the last king and, in spite of all difficulties, clinging to it down to the times of Philip and Alexander (2. 41. 5–6). Here it is obvious that the government following the overthrow of the kings must have been a far cry from the democracy of fifth-century Athens. Moreover, it is known that the democracy under Spartan influence was replaced in 417 by an oligarchy which lasted half a century.¹⁵ Polybius, clearly in agreement with contemporary usage, called any republican state a democracy. It is possible that the requirement of the age of thirty for voting was carried over from the oligarchy.

Finally it is hardly too much to say that the body reconstructed by Giovannini for the *synkletos* at Sicyon is so fantastic for a state with four regular meetings a year and a well-developed practice of calling special meetings of the *ekklesia* for certain important questions that this should be reason enough to cause his solution to be rejected. It is hard to believe that the Confederacy continued to the end with four regular meetings a year, and occasional extra meetings, all of which the adult males of much of the Peloponnesus were eligible to attend. Call this government what you will, it would actually have been run by the relatively few who could attend the meetings.

Giovannini in referring to his own work emphasizes that he has proved that *the synkletos* did not exist ("s'il existe des synklétoi, la synklétos, elle n'existe pas").

14. Strabo 9. 398.

15. On the early government, cf. *Gk. Fed. States*, pp. 82 and 87 f.

This statement on page 7 is emphasized again on page 17, in the conclusion of the article. But it is not new. It has been maintained at least by myself that *synkletos* is not the name of an assembly but of an extraordinary meeting specially summoned.¹⁶ However, Giovannini remarks correctly that the Oropian inscription (*SIG*³, 675) shows that *synkletos* is a technical term used with precision. When the document mentions that the *synodos* was followed by a *synkletos*, the reader knew what the latter word meant, and what could it mean except an extraordinary meeting of the *ekklesia*? This must be what the word means also in Polybius 29. 24. 6 in the mention of the *synkletos* at Sicyon in 168.

And now for Giovannini's rejection of my own interpretation. In my opinion, he rejects it too arbitrarily. In the introductory part of his essay, when he is condemning (rightly, of course) his predecessors' practice of stating that Polybius applied both *boule* and *ekklesia* to the same assembly, he states in a footnote that Larsen has tried to preserve the traditional opposition of the two terms but in so doing has had to presuppose at the end of the third century a fundamental change in the composition and competence of the *synodos* (p. 2, n. 8). Thus he implies that it is almost an admission of defeat to believe in something in the nature of a constitutional amendment. However, if there is any state for which it would be natural to suppose something of the kind, it is the Achaean Confederacy. After the revival in the early third century, it at first had two generals at its head but later changed to one. The generals were at first elected in the spring, but the elections were later shifted to the autumn. Then in 188 the

monopoly or near monopoly of Aegium on the *synodoi* was broken. Just what was the nature of the rule adopted, it is impossible to say. It cannot have provided for rotation among all cities as Livy (38. 30. 1–5) implies. Megalopolis and Corinth certainly seem to have had a goodly share of the meetings. It would be perfectly natural for an organization so ready to adopt desirable changes to realize that the pretense or effort to have several meetings a year of the primary assembly of a state of its size was a farce and called for a reform. Even in the early days of the Confederacy, some of its citizens may have found the journey to the place of meeting burdensome. When in the third quarter of the third century, Corinth, Megalopolis, Argos, and many more cities were added to the Confederacy, the problem became more and more acute. Certainly no meeting of the *ekklesia* can have been attended by more than a small percentage of those qualified to attend. This may well have led to indifference on the part of many citizens. Thus the limiting of the meetings of the *ekklesia* to a few extraordinary meetings, each devoted to one question of unusual importance, may well have had the purpose of stimulating the interest of the voters.

These various considerations make it relatively safe to retain the interpretation that at some time between 217 and 200 the law limiting the assembling of the *ekklesia* to the extraordinary meetings was passed. The statements in the sources about the law imply that it was an innovation, as has been recognized also by Aymard and Giovannini, though their interpretations of the resulting government differ greatly from mine. I agree with Giovannini that the Achaean Confederacy

16. For a brief statement, see *Gk. Fed. States*, pp. 223 f. and index of technical terms p. 532; cf. also *Rep. Govt.*, pp. 87–92.

after 281 B.C. had a government including an *ekklesia* and a probouleutic *boule*, but differ from him in maintaining that after 200, and probably a few years earlier, only the *boule* and magistrates met at the regular *synodoi*. Therewith the *boule* naturally ceased to be a probouleutic council and became a representative assembly qualified to handle all normal government business except the special problems reserved for the extraordinary meetings of the primary assembly. Even for these meetings, it did not act as a probouleutic body. Instead, when the meeting was called, the problem to be taken up was announced in advance, but the motions to be voted upon were formulated at the meeting. Of course, this hardly means that, whatever the theory, it was left to any chance voter to bring in a motion. In most cases, leaders undoubtedly formulated their policies before the meeting. Thus in 168 Callicrates and Polybius and their supporters certainly knew before they came to Sicyon to attend the *synkletos* what policy they were to advocate. At times there even was a caucus of leaders discussing the policy to be adopted. Best known is the gathering of eight leaders in 170 who discussed the attitude to be adopted in the war between Rome and Macedonia and nominated Archon to be elected general and Polybius *hipparch*. They were duly elected and served the year 170–169.¹⁷

The theory of the change caused by the new Achaean law or laws shortly before 200 does not remove all difficulties, but reduces their number considerably. When I followed the interpretation given above as (1), I was aware of many difficulties but accepted the solutions of earlier scholars. Later I observed that the really

valid evidence for the presence of the *ekklesia* at the *synodoi* belonged to the period before 217. It was the desire to test this theory that caused me to prepare the appendix on Achaean meetings in *Representative Government*, pages 165–88. The result of this study seemed to bear out the theory of a constitutional change, while, as has been said before, Giovannini's valid evidence for the presence of the *ekklesia* at the *synodoi* all belongs to the earlier period. The renewal of alliances in 185 cited by him (p. 12) seems to be of a more or less routine variety not requiring action by the *ekklesia*.¹⁸ The meeting in 154, at which both the Rhodians and the Cretans asked for help and at which it was decided—clearly without any reference to the *ekklesia*—to help neither, suggests that military aid (*boetheia*) did not need to be referred to the *ekklesia*.¹⁹

It should not be necessary to repeat that the change in the Achaean government just discussed gave the Confederacy a government which was essentially representative. Yet many may hesitate to accept this on the ground that Polybius, at least in the preserved parts of his work, does not bring this out. There is, however, one statement which does bring it out indirectly. This is the statement, in connection with disorders in the Macedonian republics organized in 167, that the Macedonians were unaccustomed to “democratical and representative government” (31. 2. 12), to cite Thirlwall's translation once more.²⁰ The expression which is translated “representative government” is *synedriake politeia*. It should not be necessary to say that a *synedrion*, like a *boule*, is a council and that the two terms at times are almost interchangeable, *synedrion* be-

17. Polyb. 28. 6; *Gk. Fed. States*, p. 470.

18. On this point, cf. Walbank, p. 140.

19. Another less likely possibility is that only positive action required reference to an extraordinary meeting. A negative decision could be made by the *boule*. Undoubtedly

it often happened that the *boule* of a city practically vetoed a proposal by the simple process of refusing to bring in a *probouleuma*.

20. Cf. *Rep. Govt.*, p. 104; V. Ehrenberg, *The Greek State*² (1969), p. 130.

ing widely used for the councils of federal states. The patronizing remark about the Macedonians certainly implies that Polybius considered his own government essentially a representative government. It was the only Achaean government he had known, the earlier form having been abandoned before he grew up and prob-

ably even before he was born. The fact that the Achaeans may have continued to call their council *boule* does not invalidate this argument. *Synedrion* was the name used for the Macedonian councils and was in general a widely used name for the council of a federal state.

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